

# Rooted in Community:

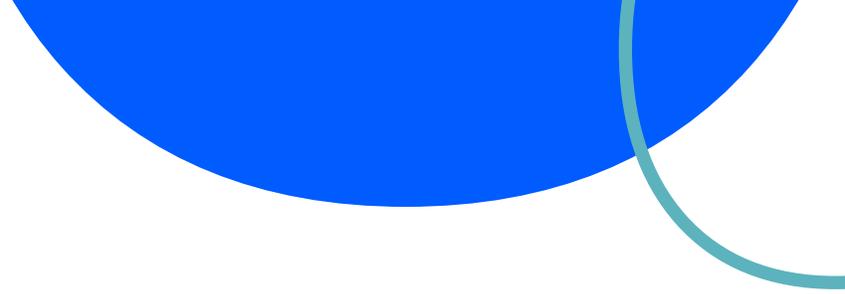
The Infrastructure Powering  
Collective Giving



Dorothy A. Johnson Center  
FOR PHILANTHROPY



Philanthropy  
Together



# Note from the Authors

The future of philanthropy is abundant, and collective giving offers a vivid example of how that future is already taking shape. In our first report, *In Abundance: An Analysis of the Thriving Landscape of Collective Giving in the U.S.* (Loson-Ceballos & Layton, 2024), we documented the scale and energy of this movement. The second report, *Patterns in the Tapestry: A Typology of Collective Giving Groups* (Krause & Layton, 2024), provided a framework for understanding how collective giving groups organize themselves and the range of models that have emerged within the field. This 2026 report builds on that foundation by examining what enables collective giving to endure over time.

Specifically, this report turns attention from the visible growth of collective giving to the underlying root system that makes that growth possible: the infrastructure that anchors collective giving in communities and supplies the resources and connections for long-term impact.

That durability is shaped by infrastructure: the organizations, relationships, and systems that support collective giving beyond individual groups themselves. Together, hosts, networks, platforms, researchers, and field-level actors create the conditions that allow collective giving to grow and remain rooted in community leadership.

Drawing on survey data and in-depth interviews, this report reflects a consistent refrain: collective giving does not sustain itself through individual commitment alone. Its ability to persist, scale, and deepen its civic contribution depends on infrastructure that stabilizes participation, supports leadership, and connects people and practice over time.

We complete this report at a moment of both challenge and possibility for philanthropy. Cuts in U.S. funding for nonprofits and international aid, coupled with mounting criticism of the sector, have heightened attention to the role of everyday givers and the systems that facilitate their engagement. Our hope is that this report contributes meaningfully by clarifying why infrastructure matters and by identifying practical opportunities to strengthen it.

The opportunities identified in this report are grounded in empirical analysis and informed by dialogue with key actors across the field. They constitute the central contribution of this work: a clear framework for strengthening the infrastructure that enables collective generosity at scale.

We present an evidence-based argument and outline practical steps for leaders, funders, and advocates to invest in the systems that sustain participation and leadership over time. Our aim is to provide insights that guide action and strengthen the infrastructure that supports collective giving. In doing so, we seek to ensure that collective generosity, and the civic life it sustains, can endure and thrive.

In solidarity,

Adriana and Michael



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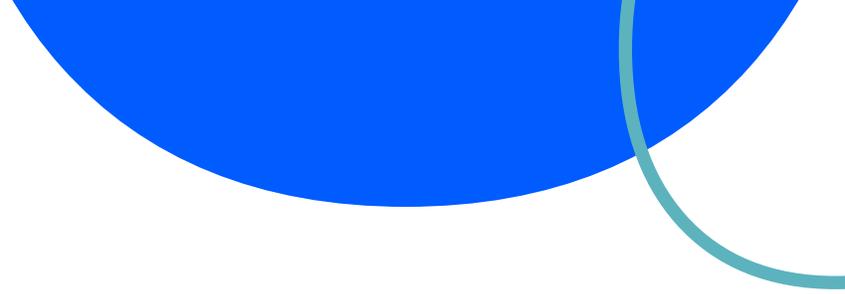
# Acknowledgements, Disclosure, and Research Notes

This report was made possible by the generosity, insight, and time of many individuals and organizations across the collective giving ecosystem. We are grateful to the infrastructure leaders and funders who shared their experiences and perspectives through interviews and conversations, grounding this research in lived practice. This work is the result of a collaborative partnership between the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy (Johnson Center) at Grand Valley State University; Colmena Consulting; and Philanthropy Together. We also gratefully acknowledge the philanthropic support that made this research possible, including funding provided to Philanthropy Together and the Johnson Center by the Fidelity Charitable® Catalyst Fund, the Gates Foundation, the Lodestar Foundation, and W.K. Kellogg Foundation. We extend special thanks to Tenaja Jordan for her contributions to the analysis and support in developing an earlier draft of this report, as well as to Sandra Osei for her contributions throughout the research process.

In the interest of transparency, we also name the relational and institutional context in which this research was conducted. Philanthropy Together, a primary partner in this project and a focus of analysis in this report, also provided funding support and played a central role in facilitating access to infrastructure leaders for interviews. In addition, members of the research team are themselves part of the broader infrastructure that supports collective giving. These overlapping roles reflect the collaborative and field-embedded nature of this work and are disclosed here so that readers can interpret the findings with a clear understanding of our position within the ecosystem.

For clarity and consistency in reporting, study participants are grouped into two primary categories: (1) infrastructure leaders, including hosts, networks, field catalysts, and platform providers; and (2) funders, including both collective giving supporters and field-level philanthropic funders. To protect participant anonymity, these broad labels are used as the primary identifiers throughout the report, with more specific organizational roles noted only when necessary to interpret findings or data.





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# Executive Summary

Collective giving offers one of the most community-rooted and accessible entry points into philanthropy and civic life today. As documented in *In Abundance: An Analysis of the Thriving Landscape of Collective Giving in the U.S.* (Loson-Ceballos & Layton, 2024), more than 4,000 collective giving groups engaged 370,000 participants and mobilized an estimated \$3.1 billion between 2017 and 2023. Beyond financial contributions, these groups expand participation in philanthropy, strengthen community-based organizations, and foster civic engagement through shared decision-making and relationship-building.

This report examines the infrastructure that enables collective giving to function at scale. Infrastructure refers to the organizations, relationships, and systems that support collective giving beyond individual groups. Drawing on survey data, interviews with infrastructure leaders and funders, and a targeted review of relevant literature, the analysis explores how infrastructure shapes the durability, reach, and equity of collective giving.

## What We Mean by Infrastructure

Infrastructure is the ecosystem that sustains collective giving. It includes:

- Hosts that provide fiscal and operational stability.
- Networks that connect circles and foster shared learning.
- Platforms that simplify participation and scale access.
- Researchers that generate evidence and inform strategy.
- Field catalysts that align tools, narratives, and coordination across the movement.

## Key Findings: How Infrastructure Shapes Collective Giving

- 1. Infrastructure connects and strengthens the collective giving ecosystem.** It anchors circles in trusted structures, links leaders to communities of practice, and supports shared learning so groups endure and adapt across geography and identity.
- 2. Infrastructure accelerates growth and builds legitimacy.** Research, storytelling, and coordination make collective giving visible and credible to donors, institutions, and partners.
- 3. Infrastructure expands access by lowering barriers and advancing equity.** Hosting, technology, and culturally grounded networks reduce barriers to participation, making it possible for more people to give, lead, and shape decisions.

## Opportunities for Strengthening Collective Giving Infrastructure

- 1. Strengthen the connective tissue of the ecosystem.** Resource hosting, convening, and peer learning to sustain relationships and coordination.
- 2. Fortify systems that grow legitimacy and visibility.** Invest in research, technology, and aligned messaging to make collective giving easier to see and trust.
- 3. Lower barriers and expand participation.** Support culturally rooted networks, leadership pipelines, and flexible models that widen access.

Taken together, these opportunities show how leaders, funders, and advocates can strengthen the infrastructure that enables collective giving to operate with shared leadership, belonging, and trust at scale. Infrastructure is the root system of collective giving. When supported, it transforms dispersed generosity into a durable, equitable movement that strengthens civic life. At a time of contracting resources and fragile social and institutional trust, investing in infrastructure ensures that collective giving continues to democratize philanthropy and sustain community leadership.

# Elements of the Collective Giving Infrastructure

The collective giving movement is built on a simple but transformative practice: people pooling their resources, making decisions together, and directing support to their communities. At its center are the members and giving circles themselves, which turn individual generosity into collective action and measurable community impact.

What allows these groups to grow and endure are the systems of support that surround them. This infrastructure provides the operational, relational, and strategic foundation that allows collective giving to function effectively. It connects people, strengthens organizations, and ensures that generosity is sustained, coordinated, and capable of creating long-term change.

## Defining Collective Giving Infrastructure

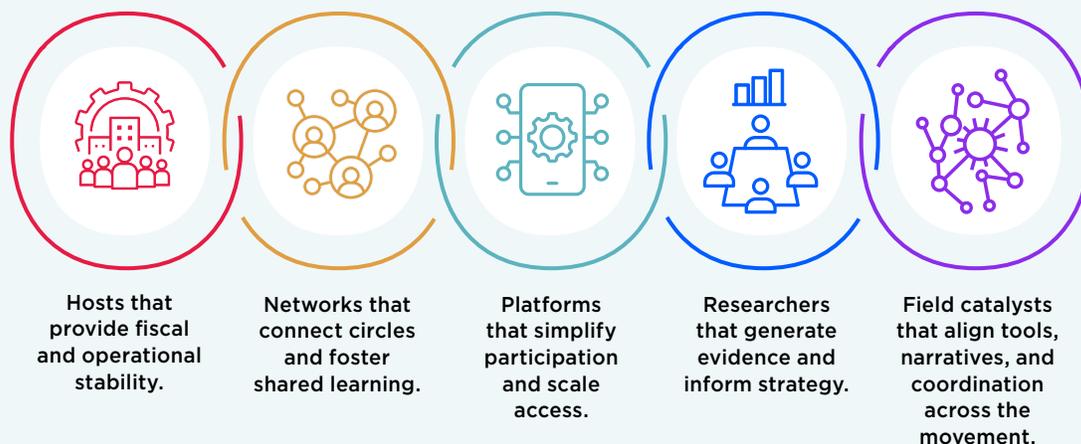
Adapting the Urban Institute's framework for social sector infrastructure (Tomasko et al., 2023), we define collective giving infrastructure as a dynamic ecosystem of people and institutions that sustain, expand, and shape the movement. Infrastructure makes it possible for people to give together with purpose, power, and joy by providing the systems that stabilize participation, connect leaders, and translate generosity into collective action. Infrastructure contributes to the field in five interconnected ways:

- **Sustainability:** Infrastructure provides the operational, financial, and administrative systems that allow collective giving groups to persist over time, maintain compliance, and carry leadership through moments of transition.
- **Learning:** Infrastructure creates shared learning pathways through training, peer exchange, and skill-building that help leaders adapt their practices, strengthen governance, and deepen collective capacity.
- **Research:** Infrastructure generates and shares data and analysis that document impact, reveal patterns, and anchor field narratives in evidence, supporting strategic decision-making and institutional legitimacy.
- **Relationship-building:** Infrastructure connects people, circles, and organizations into networks of trust and mutual accountability, transforming isolated groups into a coordinated ecosystem.
- **Advocacy and storytelling:** Infrastructure builds narrative visibility and shared voice, making collective giving legible, credible, and influential within the broader philanthropic landscape.

Most infrastructure organizations carry out several of these functions simultaneously. Together, they create the enabling environment in which collective giving can thrive.

## Categories of Infrastructure Actors

Figure 1. The Collective Giving Infrastructure Ecosystem



Philanthropy Together's collective giving ecosystem framework illustrates how giving circles are supported by interconnected infrastructure actors — hosts, networks, platforms, researchers, and field catalysts — that together sustain participation, coordination, and long-term impact across the movement.

Five categories of infrastructure actors stand out. Each plays a distinct role, while overlapping and reinforcing the others.

- **Hosts** are most often community foundations, women's funds, or nonprofits, and increasingly include digital platforms that provide fiscal sponsorship to groups. Hosts handle fiscal and legal functions, offer administrative scaffolding, and provide the trust, continuity, and guidance that sustain circles over time.
- **Networks** connect circles across geography, identity, and issue area. They foster shared learning, collective voice, and mutual accountability, turning isolated efforts into a coordinated movement that learns and evolves together. Networks help align practices and sustain relationships across regions and causes.
- **Platforms** scale participation through digital tools for giving, community building, and learning. They lower barriers of geography, language, and resource level, enabling circles to form without institutional gatekeepers.
- **Researchers** document, interpret, and return insights to practice. They translate experience into evidence, allowing the field to understand its impact and refine its strategies. When research is participatory, it strengthens alignment across practitioners, funders, and communities.
- **Field catalysts** coordinate across these layers. They build tools, align communications, and create shared frameworks that make collaboration more efficient and equitable. Acting as both amplifiers and connectors, they accelerate learning across the ecosystem while maintaining local autonomy.

To ground these categories in concrete examples, *Appendix A* is a list of self-reported affiliations of giving circles drawn from the *In Abundance* group survey (Q5), illustrating how circles connect to a variety of supporting institutions. *Appendix B* provides a descriptive overview of collective giving networks operating in the United States, including their origins, scope, and primary roles within the ecosystem.

While both *In Abundance* and this report focus on the United States, collective giving is a global practice. This is evident in the presence of transnational networks with international membership bases, collective giving research conducted in multiple countries, and hosts and platforms operating across national contexts, all of which reflect a shared need for infrastructure that supports participation, learning, and coordination worldwide.

## Categories of Infrastructure Actors

Together, these actors embody what Propel Philanthropy calls Social Impact Infrastructure Organizations (SIOs): “the accelerators, connectors, conveners, educators, platforms, orchestrators, researchers, and trainers that enable the rest of us to effectively impact change” (Propel Philanthropy, n.d.).

Collective giving infrastructure is the root system that allows giving circles to take hold, adapt, and endure. Hosts offer stability, networks foster connection, researchers generate knowledge, and field catalysts facilitate connection and amplify visibility. Together, these root systems anchor the movement, feed its growth, and connect its branches into a resilient whole.

The following sections show how this infrastructure functions in practice. Drawing on interviews, survey data, and field research, we identify three findings that reveal what infrastructure makes possible: how it connects and stabilizes the ecosystem, builds legitimacy and visibility, and widens access to collective giving.

Amplifier



# Introduction

*“Imagine a million giving circles across the country — each one a laboratory for democracy where people come together to listen, decide, and act for the common good... And within each there are groups of Americans coming together to do good work in their communities [...] It’s the exercising of that civic engagement muscle that we need desperately in this country.”*

*- Infrastructure leader*

Collective giving is neither new nor confined to the United States. Across cultures and generations, people have long pooled resources, made decisions together, and cared for their communities. Today’s giving circles and networks continue this tradition while offering a participatory and replicable model of generosity that strengthens community leadership and civic trust (Eikenberry, 2009).

We complete this report at a challenging moment for philanthropy and civil society in the United States and globally, marked by cuts to nonprofit funding and international aid, as well as heightened criticism and scrutiny of foundations and wealthy philanthropists. This context has sharpened attention on everyday givers, described in one recent commentary as the “only donors who can save the nonprofit sector” (Callahan, 2025). Collective giving offers a powerful means of engaging these donors at scale, making it essential to understand the infrastructure and systems that enable this movement to grow and thrive.

Our first report, *In Abundance: An Analysis of the Thriving Landscape of Collective Giving in the U.S.* (Loson-Ceballos & Layton, 2024), documents the dramatic growth of the movement: nearly 4,000 active groups, 370,000 members, and an estimated \$3.1 billion mobilized between 2017 and 2023. These findings revealed a vast, diverse field full of civic promise. They also raised a critical question: What does it take to sustain the collective giving movement as it begins to scale?

This report addresses that question by examining the collective giving infrastructure of organizations, relationships, and systems that enable the movement to endure and grow. Our central finding is clear: collective giving thrives because of infrastructure. The systems that connect people, learning, and leadership translate community energy into continuity. When these systems are visible and resourced, generosity becomes durable, turning local acts of giving into a sustained movement that strengthens civic life.

Drawing on interviews with infrastructure leaders and funders, survey data from *In Abundance*, and a review of philanthropic literature, this report identifies three ways infrastructure strengthens collective giving and, in turn, civic life:

1. **Infrastructure connects and strengthens the collective giving ecosystem** by linking circles into networks of shared learning, coordination, and mutual accountability.
2. **Infrastructure accelerates growth and builds legitimacy** by supporting research, training, and aligned narratives that increase credibility and visibility within philanthropy.
3. **Infrastructure expands access by lowering barriers** through hosting, technology, and culturally grounded networks that make participation more equitable and inclusive.

This report is written for three main audiences:

- **Leaders** within the collective giving movement and its infrastructure who can use these insights to strengthen practice and collaboration.
- **Funders** committed to equity and community leadership who can invest in the systems that make philanthropy more diverse and resilient.
- **Advocates** working to renew civic trust who can lift up collective giving as a model of democratic engagement in action.

These audiences share a stake in strengthening the infrastructure that sustains collective giving as both a philanthropic movement and a civic practice. Although this research focuses on the United States, the questions it raises, and the systems it examines, are relevant wherever people are organizing to give together and build power and possibility in their communities.

CircleUp Houston // Photo Credit: Rachel Young



# Methodology

This report builds on the research design and datasets established in *In Abundance* (Loson-Ceballos & Layton, 2024). The original study documented the scope, diversity, and civic dimensions of collective giving through a mixed-methods approach that prioritized inclusivity, participant voice, and field relevance. This report extends that work by focusing specifically on the role of infrastructure in sustaining and scaling the movement.

This study was reviewed and approved by the Grand Valley State University Institutional Review Board in accordance with ethical research standards. Participants were informed of the study's purpose and their rights. All quotations from interviews are presented anonymously to preserve participant confidentiality while illustrating key findings.

## Research Design

The methodology combines secondary analysis of *In Abundance* datasets with new qualitative data collection and a targeted review of relevant literature and field reports. As with *In Abundance*, the research was conducted in close collaboration with Philanthropy Together, the global field catalyst for collective giving, and informed by ongoing engagement with practitioners and infrastructure leaders across the field. Together, these methods allow for deeper examination of how hosts, networks, platforms, researchers, and field catalysts function as infrastructure and influence durability, legitimacy, and access.

## Data Sources

This report draws on three primary sources of data:

- 1. *In Abundance* survey data.** Responses from 543 collective giving groups and 1,406 individual members provided quantitative insight into hosting arrangements, network participation, leadership structures, and participation patterns.
- 2. In-depth interviews with infrastructure leaders and funders.** Thirty semi-structured interviews with leaders from host organizations, networks, platforms, research institutions, field catalysts, and philanthropic funders explored infrastructure functions, challenges, and opportunities.
- 3. Literature and field review.** A targeted review of philanthropic literature, infrastructure frameworks, and field reports situated collective giving within broader philanthropic and civic ecosystems.

## Analysis

Quantitative survey data from *In Abundance* were analyzed to identify patterns related to hosting, network affiliation, technology use, and participation. Where relevant, we compared patterns among groups with different types of infrastructure support. Qualitative data from interviews and focus groups were analyzed using an iterative thematic coding process. Transcripts were reviewed multiple times to identify recurring themes related to stability, legitimacy, access, learning, and coordination. Coding was informed by patterns that emerged in the original *In Abundance* analysis and adapted to focus specifically on infrastructure. Direct quotations are included throughout the report to preserve participant voice and illustrate key findings.

## Scope and Limitations

As with *In Abundance*, this research relies on opt-in participation and therefore reflects a non-probabilistic sample. While the findings cannot be generalized to all collective giving groups, the breadth of participation across geography, identity, and infrastructure types provides a robust picture of field-level patterns.

This report focuses on the United States, reflecting the scope of the underlying datasets. However, interviews, literature, and field observations suggest that many of the dynamics described here may also apply in geographic contexts beyond the United States.

The Funding Network // Photo Credit: Daniel Lewis



# Findings

Our analysis of survey data, interviews, and field observations reveals three ways that infrastructure is a critical driver of collective giving's growth and long-term success. First, infrastructure connects people, learning, and leadership into a coordinated ecosystem. This stabilizes participation and enables collective action across contexts. Second, infrastructure builds legitimacy and visibility through research, shared narratives, and field-wide coordination that enhances the field's credibility and coherence. Third, infrastructure expands access by lowering barriers to participation and creating pathways that enable more people to enter, lead, and belong. This expanded access embeds equity into the everyday practices of collective giving.

**Taken together, these findings demonstrate that infrastructure transforms generosity from isolated acts into a sustained civic practice capable of strengthening community leadership at scale.**

2019 Giving Circle Infrastructure Conference // Photo Credit: Gates Archive/Bruce Toms



## FINDING 1

# Infrastructure Connects and Strengthens the Collective Giving Ecosystem

Collective giving thrives when supported by infrastructure. Hosts, platforms, and networks provide the operational and relational systems that link people, anchor groups in trusted structures, and help sustain participation over time. Without these supports, circles risk being isolated and short-lived. With them, groups become part of a shared practice that can weather leadership transitions, adapt to changing conditions, and collaborate across geography and identity. Infrastructure helps to transform individual acts of giving into a connected ecosystem that fosters learning, coordination, and long-term civic engagement.

### 1.1. Infrastructure anchors collective giving in trusted host institutions that provide both operational and relational stability.

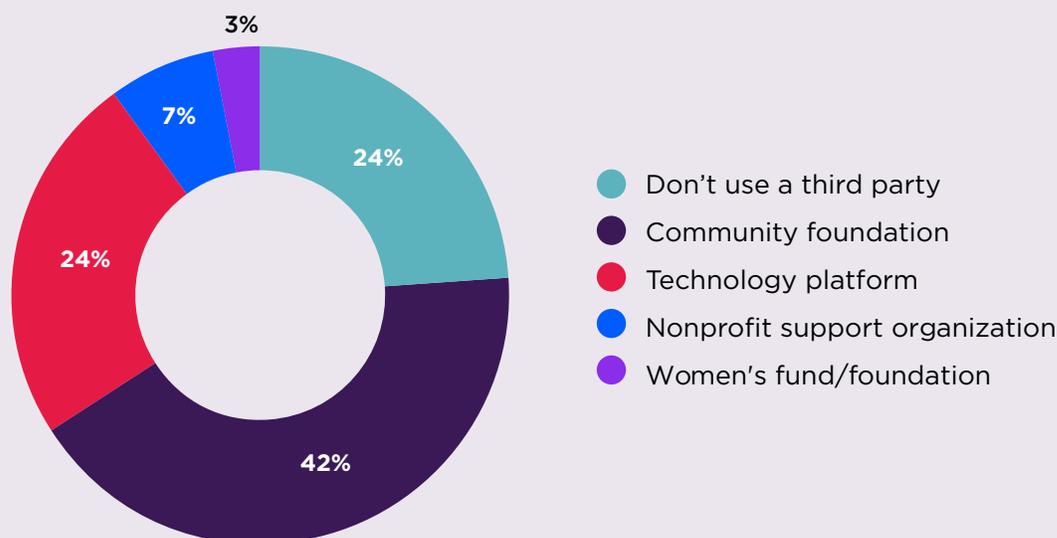
Hosts are one of the most critical, yet often overlooked, components of collective giving infrastructure. Community foundations, women's funds, nonprofits, and technology platforms frequently serve in this role, providing fiscal sponsorship, compliance, and administrative scaffolding that allow circles to operate within formal philanthropic systems (Bearman & Franklin, 2018). Many also offer coaching, convening, and strategic guidance that strengthens long-term capacity. Given that the movement is powered by volunteers, this support is even more important.

CircleUp San Francisco // Photo Credit: Marla Aufmuth



Data from the *In Abundance* group survey underscore the central role of hosts in sustaining collective giving. Forty-two percent of giving circles are hosted by community foundations, followed by technology platforms such as Grapevine (24%), with smaller shares housed within nonprofit organizations (7%) or women’s funds (3%). Less than half of all groups (47%) benefit from paid staff support, most often provided by host organizations rather than the circles themselves. This data point underlines that this is a volunteer-led and -powered movement, making support from infrastructure that much more important. While 24% of groups operate independently without a fiscal sponsor, the data show that the great majority rely on hosts for stability and support. Hosts do more than manage compliance. They reduce administrative burdens, enhance visibility, and provide the operational backbone that allows circles to focus on learning, engagement, and impact.

**Figure 2: Institutional Host or Fiscal Agent Used by Collective Giving Groups**



Participation in philanthropy often comes with steep barriers, such as accepting donations, issuing tax-deductible receipts, and managing communications and logistics. Hosts fill these gaps by handling the compliance and administrative requirements that allow grassroots collective giving groups to operate without forming their own 501(c)(3).



**It's not the most glamorous stuff, but the infrastructure piece — legal, fiscal — if that's not there, the whole thing falls apart.**

- Infrastructure leader

Beyond operations, hosts often serve as the relational anchor of collective giving. They mentor circle founders, guide early decisions, and provide continuity when volunteer energy ebbs. Their steady presence nurtures the trust, rhythm, and belonging that allow circles to stay connected to the values and communities that inspired their creation.

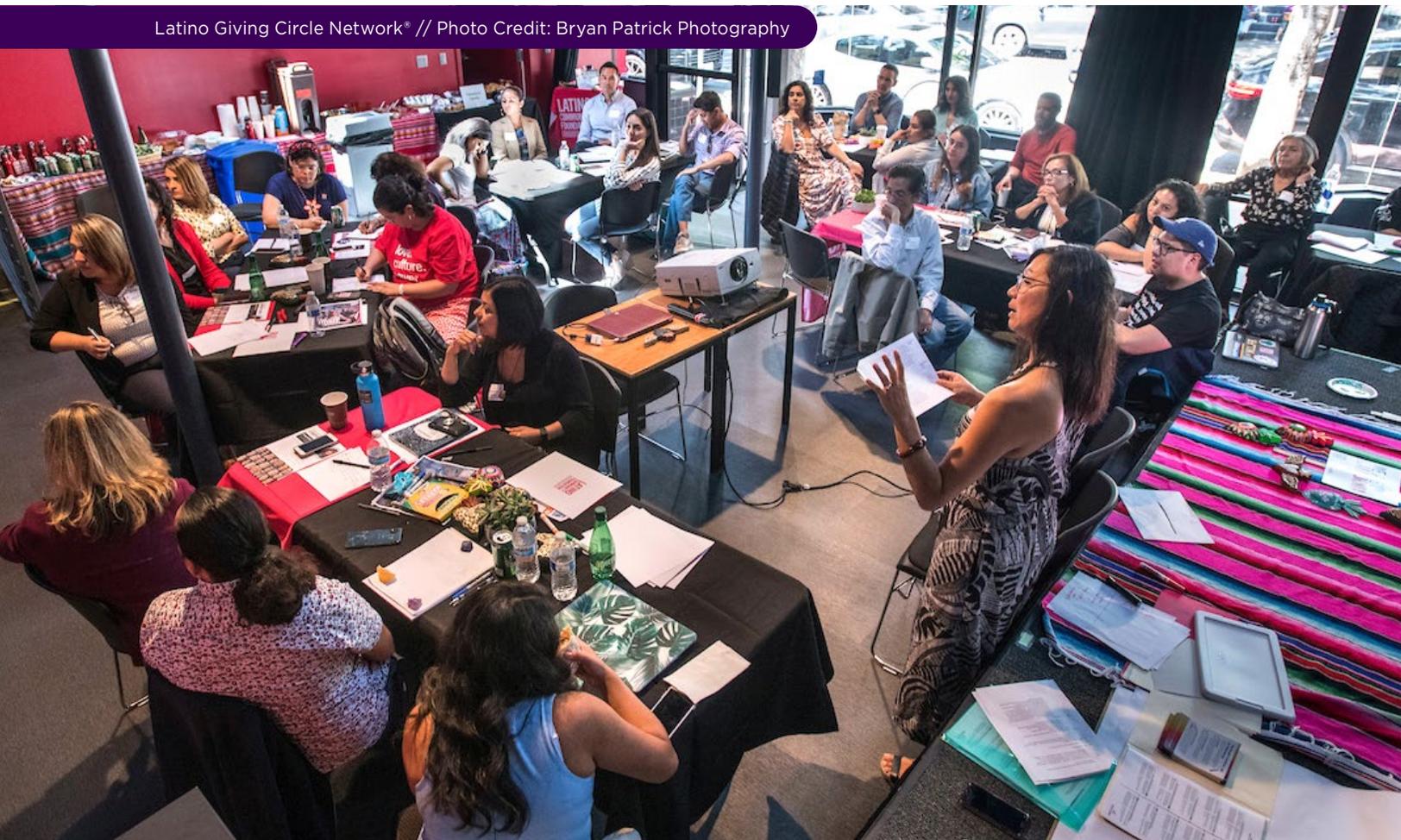


**Without a host, circles would burn out fast. Volunteers can only carry compliance and administration for so long. Hosts keep us stable so the energy can go toward impact.**

- Infrastructure leader

By pairing operational reliability with relational care, hosts provide a durable structure for collective giving groups. They help ensure that generosity rooted in living rooms and local networks can endure leadership transitions, adapt to changing conditions, and remain connected to community values over time. *Appendix A* presents a list of organizations identified by respondents to *In Abundance* group survey (Q5) as their affiliations, highlighting the diversity of relationships that support collective giving in practice.

Latino Giving Circle Network® // Photo Credit: Bryan Patrick Photography



## HOST PROFILE

# A Regional Community Foundation

One regional community foundation (anonymized to maintain confidentiality) hosts nearly a dozen giving circles as part of its commitment to equity and grassroots leadership. These circles reflect and support communities of color and include youth-led efforts. Hosting emerged from an internal reckoning with representation and power when a civil rights advocate challenged the foundation to align more closely with its community, sparking the creation of identity-based funds that grew into giving circles.

Early efforts were hampered by limited capacity and no dedicated relationship manager. Today, a staff lead supports circles with communications, compliance, and leadership guidance. Supporting grassroots leaders, especially first-time funders, requires sensitivity to both community priorities and structural constraints. The foundation measures success not only in dollars raised and distributed but also in sustained engagement, alignment with mission, and strong community ties. As the staff lead reflected, “There’s so much work that needs to be done. It hasn’t been perfect. We’ve fallen, and we’ve gotten back up because the community has asked us to. We are in it to serve them. That is our mindset.”

This example illustrates a broader pattern: hosts, especially community foundations, are most successful when they view support for collective giving, particularly among marginalized communities and donors not traditionally seen as philanthropists, as a long-term investment in building a more inclusive and resilient philanthropic ecosystem. Framing hosting as donor cultivation aimed at immediate upticks in donor-advised funds or foundation gifts risks missing the deeper opportunity to strengthen community leadership and trust. This model shows how hosts can act as both anchors and bridges, ensuring circles endure while broadening the reach of community philanthropy.



## 1.2. Infrastructure leverages technology platforms to make participation easier and more sustainable.

Technology has become a vital component of collective giving infrastructure, expanding access for people who might otherwise be limited by time or geography. In the United States, Grapevine is currently the only dedicated technology platform designed specifically to support giving circles (Grapevine, n.d.). Given that approximately one in four survey respondents in *In Abundance* reported being hosted on Grapevine, we examined responses from Grapevine-hosted circles alongside the full sample to better understand how digital infrastructure shapes participation.

This comparison reveals a clear pattern. Giving circles hosted on Grapevine tend to be larger, with 42% reporting more than 100 members, compared with 38% across the full sample. Despite being a national platform without geographic limits, Grapevine's circles stay deeply local in practice—drawing 75% of members from the same city or county compared with 58% overall, recruiting fewer members at the state level (8% vs. 15%), and operating beyond local geographies far less often (8% multi-state or regional vs. 20% overall). Yet their funding reach is broader. Twenty-one percent report supporting organizations nationally (compared with 5% overall), and 8% report international giving (compared with 2% overall). Together, these findings show how digital infrastructure allows circles to maintain local relationships while extending the reach of their collective giving.

The pandemic underscored the value of online platforms like Grapevine during a crisis and under normal circumstances. When COVID-19 disrupted traditional gatherings, online platforms became the bridge that allowed giving circles to continue meeting, making decisions, and supporting nonprofits. They did not just preserve existing groups; they enabled new circles to form in response to urgent community needs. By guiding users through formation and management including pooling donations, issuing tax-deductible receipts, and sharing decisions, platforms reduced friction and accelerated action at a moment of crisis.

These features shortened the time it took to launch new groups and sustained participation when members were scattered across geographies or juggling new constraints.



**What we saw with COVID is that, for certain circles, technology was a big help — not only during COVID, but for circles around a cause. They weren't limited by a geographic boundary. Technology was the best thing that could happen to a giving circle.**

– Giving circle leader

Beyond crisis response, platforms continue to influence how members stay connected. Real-time updates and collective decision spaces help circles maintain momentum between meetings and across distance. Technology has become a continuity tool, ensuring that collective giving remains both personal and scalable. Importantly, platforms do not replace traditional hosts; they complement them. Hosts provide trusted relationships and operational stability, while technology extends that support digitally, together creating an ecosystem that blends personal connection with scalable systems.

## PLATFORM PROFILE

# Grapevine and the Infrastructure of Scale

As a user-friendly, full-service technology platform, Grapevine has been a key driver of the growth of the collective giving movement since its launch in 2020. It emerged from an early insight: that people discover and support nonprofits more meaningfully through community, yet giving circles were often slowed by administrative challenges. In response, Grapevine built a platform that lets collaborative giving groups form and begin collecting donations within minutes — pooling funds, communicating with members, issuing tax-deductible receipts, and managing transparent grantmaking in one place. Since then, Grapevine has supported thousands of giving circles and helped mobilize more than \$50 million in donations. It now serves 92,000 members, and it has supported more than 7,300 nonprofits (Grapevine, n.d.).



### 1.3. Infrastructure strengthens field-wide networks that connect circles and spread shared learning across the movement.

If hosts keep circles rooted and technology platforms connect them digitally, networks provide the connective infrastructure that links collective giving across geography, identity, and purpose. (For a list of giving circle networks, see Appendix B). They foster peer learning, amplify collective power, and bridge local action with field-level coordination, spreading innovations and affirming that hyperlocal giving is part of a broader movement. By creating the channels through which ideas, resources, and strategies circulate, networks turn isolated efforts into a shared learning ecosystem.



**It was about creating a more community-based, meaningful model for everyday people to get involved — really democratizing philanthropy so more people could give and support their communities. Connecting with the giving circle movement gave us a chance to add value, learn from existing groups, and collaborate to help expand the movement.**

- Infrastructure leader

Survey data confirm that most circles do not operate alone, but as part of an interconnected web. Findings from the *In Abundance* group survey reveal that 84% of groups participate in the collective giving infrastructure — 49% through a host organization (mainly community foundations and women’s funds), 24% through a network, and 13% through a nonprofit sponsor for which the group raises funds. (For a list of self-reported affiliations, see Appendix A.) Even though hosts account for half of affiliations and nonprofits support a smaller segment, the fact that networks connect a quarter of collective giving groups is especially significant for understanding how circles learn, coordinate, and build shared identity. This matters because networks play a distinct role within the infrastructure: they link circles directly to one another, enabling shared learning, coordination, and a collective identity that hosting alone cannot provide. Through these networked relationships, local giving becomes part of a broader field-wide practice rather than a set of parallel efforts.

**24% of collective giving groups belong to a giving circle network**

Networks' influence becomes even clearer when examining how they operate in practice. Through convenings, peer cohorts, and shared campaigns, networks turn one circle's innovation into another's inspiration, keeping the field dynamic and responsive. They operate less as formal institutions and more as ecosystems of trust that facilitate exchange rather than enforce uniformity. Within networks, circles share templates, decision-making tools, and engagement practices that reflect their communities. These exchanges accelerate adaptation while honoring differences, allowing the field to mature through shared experience rather than standardized design.

Together Women Rise offers one example of how networks function as platforms for collaborative learning. Through structured engagement opportunities and partnerships in the Global South, the network enables members to share resources, stories, and advocacy tools that inform giving decisions and deepen understanding of gender equity. These exchanges foster belonging and generosity across borders while encouraging learning across diverse contexts rather than a single model (Together Women Rise, n.d.).



**The network helps you realize you're not alone... that this isn't just something happening in your city — it's a national movement with shared values.**

- Infrastructure leader

By connecting leaders across contexts, networks foster solidarity and stamina. They help circles persist through leadership transitions, navigate conflict, and reimagine structure when circumstances shift. Yet despite their central role, many networks remain volunteer-run and chronically under-resourced, limiting their capacity to sustain this connective work over time.



**There's nothing, no support for the everyday philanthropist. The current state of fundraising is very hard.**

- Infrastructure leader

At their best, networks cultivate shared stewardship. They align purpose, surface values, and coordinate rhythms of reflection that keep collaboration alive. When networks function well, they distribute leadership, celebrate local distinctiveness, and strengthen the sense that each circle contributes to something larger than itself. In doing so, networks transform collaboration into infrastructure itself, creating the feedback loops and shared vision that allow collective giving to act, adapt, and endure as one movement.

## NETWORK PROFILE

# Philanos: A Network Advancing Women's Collective Giving

Philanos began in 2009 as a gathering of leaders from eight women's giving organizations and formally launched as a 501(c)(3) in 2013 (Philanos, n.d.). Today, it connects more than 100 affiliate giving groups in 31 U.S. states, Washington, D.C., Australia, and England. With more than 21,000 active participants, Philanos supports a diverse community of women engaged in informed, impactful grantmaking. Since 1995, its member circles have invested over \$250 million into their communities (Philanos, n.d.).

Philanos strengthens this network through convenings, leadership development, and shared resources that amplify women's leadership and collective impact. By connecting circles across geography and experience, Philanos makes local experiments visible, carries knowledge across the field, and builds confidence in the role of women's philanthropy.

The significance of Philanos goes beyond its size. The *In Abundance* report documented that collective giving in the United States is largely a women-led movement. Philanos embodies this reality. It demonstrates how women's leadership has shaped the growth of collective giving, cultivated new generations of leaders, and expanded practices rooted in women's philanthropy. These practices — relational, collective, and grounded in care — stand in contrast to traditional male-driven models of institutional philanthropy. By re-rooting giving in systems of collective care, Philanos shows how networks not only sustain the movement but transform philanthropy itself into a more inclusive and democratic practice.

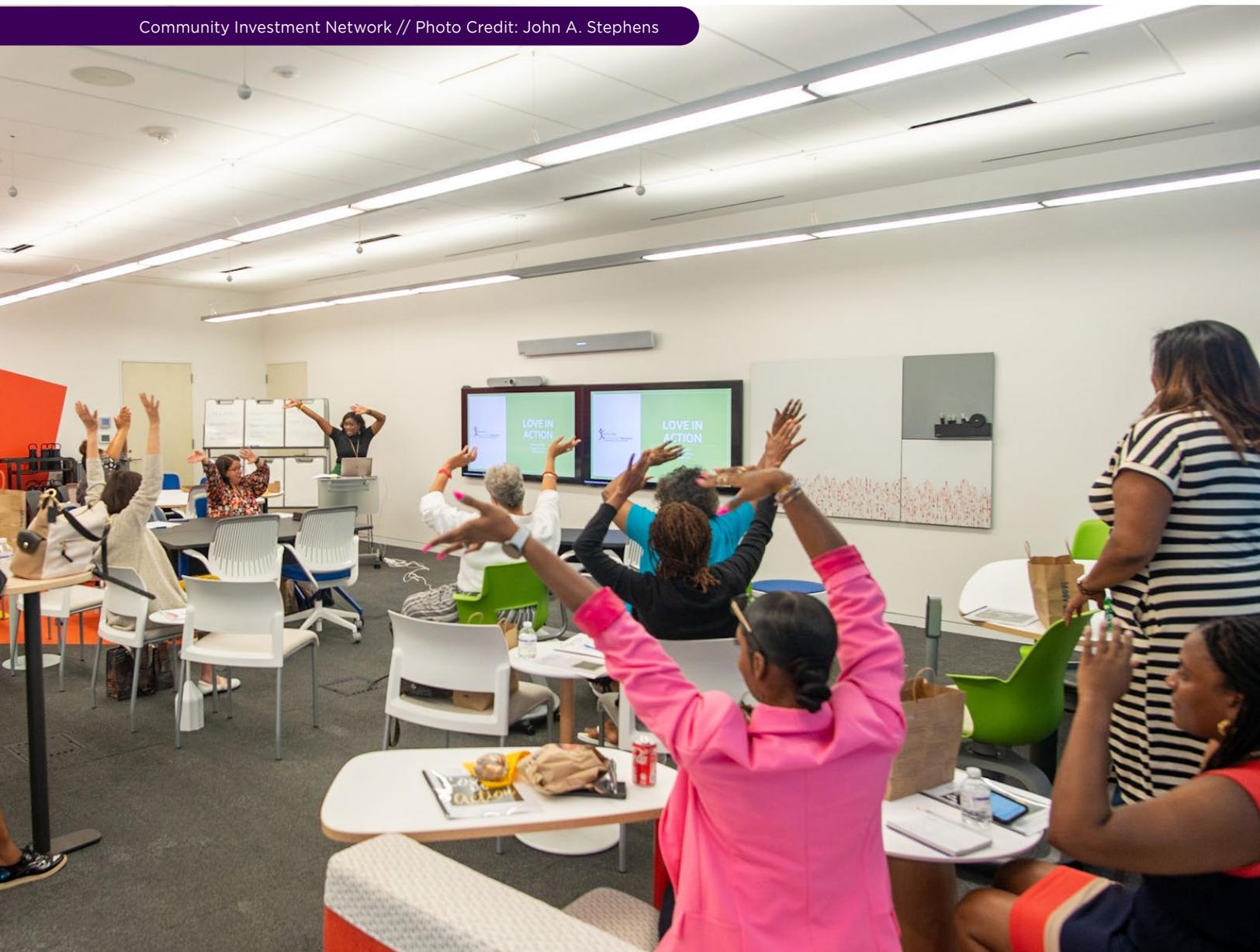


**PHILANOS BOARD**

## Conclusion

Hosts, platforms, and networks work together to stabilize collective giving by transforming dispersed generosity into a connected ecosystem. These systems anchor participation in trusted structures, extend reach without eroding local relationships, and link groups into communities of shared learning and accountability. Groups connected to infrastructure offer far richer learning for members: in our survey, 83% of affiliated circles provided at least one structured learning or engagement opportunity compared with just 12% of unaffiliated circles. Affiliated groups typically offered three distinct activities — most commonly networking and social opportunities, speakers or training workshops, and volunteer opportunities — about nine times the variety of unaffiliated groups, and one-third delivered five or more opportunities. These activities, enabled by infrastructure, enrich participation and strengthen resilience, preparing the ground for the growth and legitimacy explored in Finding 2.

Community Investment Network // Photo Credit: John A. Stephens



## FINDING 2

# Infrastructure Accelerates Growth and Builds Legitimacy

Collective giving has entered a phase of rapid expansion, fueled by infrastructure that converts local enthusiasm into organized growth. Infrastructure shapes how growth is understood, trusted, and sustained. The same systems that stabilize circles now help them multiply, reach wider audiences, and earn recognition as a credible force in philanthropy. Beyond numbers, growth depends on legitimacy, which is based on the trust, visibility, and shared knowledge that allow a field to be taken seriously and sustained over time. Infrastructure builds that legitimacy by producing evidence, aligning narratives, and coordinating action across the ecosystem. In this finding, we examine three ways that infrastructure transforms connection into scale: through research that strengthens knowledge, storytelling that reshapes public understanding, and field catalysts that expand collective capacity.

### **2.1. Infrastructure builds field knowledge through research that demonstrates impact and informs strategy.**

Research is the feedback system of collective giving, transforming experience into evidence and credibility that legitimizes the movement. By documenting patterns and returning findings to the field, research helps hosts, networks, and funders make decisions based on knowledge rather than assumptions. One funder's quote underscores this truth:



**When funders see the data, they finally understand this is not a hobby — it's a serious philanthropic force.**

- Funder

From the earliest studies, researchers have traced the field’s growth. An initial survey of giving circles in 2005, sponsored by the United Philanthropy Forum, found 61 groups engaging 5,700 donors and moving \$44 million (Rutnik & Bearman, 2005). Two years later, the Forum’s 2007 landscape report identified 400 circles with 12,000 participants (Bearman, 2007). In 2017, the Collective Giving Research Group estimated that there were 1,600 collective giving groups with more than 150,000 participants and \$1.29 billion in pooled giving (Bearman et al., 2017). The *In Abundance* research documented the next surge: nearly 4,000 collective giving groups engaging 370,000 people who have mobilized over \$3.1 billion between 2017 and 2023 (Loson-Ceballos & Layton, 2024).

**Table 1. Growth of Collective Giving Groups, Participants, and Dollars (2005–2023)**

Metric	2005	2007	2017	2023
People / Participants	5,700	12,000	150,000+	370,000
Groups / Circles	61	400	1,600	~4,000
Dollars Mobilized	\$44M	– <i>(not reported)</i>	\$1.29B <i>(cumulative since inception)</i>	\$3.1B <i>(cumulative 2017–2023)</i>

SOURCES: Rutnik & Bearman (2005); Bearman (2007); Bearman et al. (2017); Loson-Ceballos & Layton (2024).

## Clarifying Notes

- 2005:** The figure 61 refers to the surveyed sample of circles. The total 5,700 people/participants and \$44M raised reflect 77 circles, including Social Venture Partners affiliates.
- 2007:** Dollar amounts were not comprehensively reported; the study documented \$13M granted in 2006 among surveyed groups, but no movement-wide total for 2007.
- 2016:** The \$1.29B figure reflects cumulative giving since inception across an estimated 1,600 collective giving groups.
- 2023:** The \$3.1B total reflects cumulative giving between 2017 and 2023, not a single-year amount.

This research documents a clear and dramatic trajectory of growth in the U.S., lending greater visibility and legitimacy to the field. For example, between April 2, 2024 and January 31, 2026, the Johnson Center’s landing page for collective giving research received 35,016 views, and the *In Abundance* report was downloaded 3,655 times, together pointing to a strong demand for actionable field data (Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy, n.d.). Research promotes learning across the field by transforming local experimentation into shared understanding and collective capacity.

Beyond documenting the growth of the movement, research has helped to inform its development and demonstrate its broader impact (Eikenberry, 2009). The landscape study conducted by the Collective Giving Research Group not only tracked the movement’s expansion but also inspired a gathering of network leaders whose collaboration led to the creation of Philanthropy Together (Bearman et al., 2017; Krause, 2021). As Krause (2021) recalled, two days of intensive discussions among 50 network leaders surfaced both shared insights and shared challenges:



**Beyond the bells and whistles of a communications campaign blitz, annual convenings, and webinars, this field needed infrastructure to scale and strengthen this movement over the long term.**

More recent collaborations, such as *Patterns in the Tapestry: A Typology of Collective Giving Groups*, have brought researchers and practitioners together to translate field experience into a meaningful framework that helps strengthen and guide the movement (Krause & Layton, 2024). Research has also shown that collective giving contributes to the democratization of philanthropy by expanding participation and fostering both bonding and bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000, Chapter 1) – encouraging donors to support communities beyond their own identity groups (Carboni & Eikenberry, 2021).

CircleUp New Mexico // Photo Credit: Hyunju Blemel



## RESEARCHER PROFILE

# Practitioner-Led Research

The trajectory of Adriana Loson-Ceballos' research (one of the authors of this report) illustrates how knowledge in this field is built collaboratively and rooted in practice. As a member of the Latino Giving Circle Network®, she co-led its evaluation with circle leaders across California in 2020. This participatory study centered the network's learning goals and ensured member voices shaped how Latino philanthropy was represented by and for Latinos (Latino Community Foundation, 2023).

The methodology used in that evaluation became the foundation for her doctoral dissertation (Loson-Ceballos, 2022) and later informed the design of *In Abundance: An Analysis of the Thriving Landscape of Collective Giving in the U.S.* (Loson-Ceballos & Layton, 2024), the largest census of the U.S. collective giving movement to date. Co-led with ecosystem partners, *In Abundance* was designed to be actionable: leaders helped frame questions, disseminated surveys, and received tailored reports to guide network strategy.

Today, as a board member of Social Venture Partners International, a global collective giving network, Dr. Loson-Ceballos is designing and leading the Partner Survey, the largest study of philanthropist members of social venture partners (SVPs) around the world. Like her earlier work, the study is participatory, actionable, and committed to returning results to members.

This arc from circle member, to evaluator, to co-principal investigator, to global board leader shows how the ecosystem elevates its own practitioners into leadership. Research in collective giving is not extractive but reciprocal, ensuring that community voices drive both knowledge and strategy.



PHOTO CREDIT: SOCIAL VENTURE PARTNERS INTERNATIONAL

## 2.2. Infrastructure amplifies visibility and reshapes philanthropy's public narrative.

Visibility is how legitimacy takes root. Infrastructure does more than communicate; it shapes the ways stories are told and understood. Through research, shared messaging, and coordinated storytelling, it helps align many local voices into a resonant public narrative. As *The Stories We Tell* report notes, narrative infrastructure is essential to strengthening trust and collective purpose (Logan, Filippinyi, & Marange, 2025).



**In my paid work life... I've been involved in democratizing and diversifying the field of philanthropy for a long time ... and the whole point was challenging and changing the idea of who is a philanthropist and what counts as philanthropy. Collective giving is a cousin of that work... redefining and reclaiming who is a philanthropist, who is a donor, who is generous, and what counts as giving.**

- Infrastructure leader

Infrastructure leaders synthesize learning across circles, translate practice into language funders understand, and align how the field describes itself. In this way, they build the field's narrative architecture. They collect data, interpret experience, and translate local stories into messages that resonate across audiences. Shared language and imagery help circles, networks, and partners describe their work in ways that connect rather than compete. This coherence gives the field a recognizable identity that funders, policymakers, and peers can relate to and trust.

Field catalysts, such as Philanthropy Together, play a central role in building visibility for the collective giving movement. They translate local practices into language and awareness that the broader sector can understand while amplifying the diversity within them. Through campaigns, digital tools, speaking engagements, earned media, and convenings, they ensure that circles and networks are represented as part of a unified, yet plural, movement.

Public engagement strategies reinforce this work by creating repeated opportunities for the public to encounter a clear, consistent story: collective giving is organized, joyful, and grounded in community leadership. Visibility is not marketing; it is field-building. It converts attention into understanding and understanding into legitimacy, allowing the work of hundreds of small groups to register as part of a larger civic movement.

One example is the 100 Who Care Alliance, which now supports more than 700 groups and uses resources and campaigns such as “#thePOWERof100” to scale reach and awareness. The Alliance began as a networking and learning platform for local giving circle leaders and, following its first conference in 2015, expanded to provide resources that support communication and operations for new and existing circles (100 Who Care Alliance, n.d.).

By designing systems of narrative alignment, infrastructure transforms communication into shared power. Visibility, when built on truth and trust, fuels recognition, investment, and participation. It ensures that collective giving is not a side story of philanthropy but a central path toward its democratization and long-term vitality.



**We need this little army of ambassadors of the movement to keep talking about it... because we are building, and building takes time.**

- Infrastructure leader

100 Women Who Care North Suburban Chicago



## NARRATIVE SPOTLIGHT

# Collective Giving on the Public Stage

In her TED Talk, “Your invitation to disrupt philanthropy,” Philanthropy Together CEO Sara Lomelin offers an urgent and inspiring call to democratize giving. Speaking from her extensive experience in building and supporting giving circles worldwide, she challenges the concentration of philanthropic power in the hands of a few and highlights the transformative potential of collective giving. Lomelin frames giving circles as a joyful, relational, and disruptive force that centers community voice, shifts narratives of who is a philanthropist, and redefines how resources flow. Her talk emphasizes that generosity is not reserved for the wealthy but is accessible to everyone and that, when people come together, they can change both philanthropy and society itself.

Framing collective giving as a powerful and growing movement, the TED Talk serves as a tool for giving circles, hosts, and networks. Upon its release, Philanthropy Together published a digital communications toolkit to amplify the talk’s messages. Four months after release, the talk had been viewed more than 1 million times. It has been viewed more than 1.5 million times as of this writing and is still referenced in news articles and presentations on collective giving today.

TED 2022 // PHOTO CREDIT: TED/GILBERTO TADDAY



**Giving by, for, and with the communities we represent is the future of philanthropy and each and every one of us belong in this movement.**

- Sara Lomelin

## 2.3. Infrastructure expands capacity through field catalysts that scale resources and coordination.

Field catalysts are emerging actors that connect the dots across the ecosystem of hosts, networks, and collective giving groups. Organizations like Philanthropy Together coordinate strategies, elevate narratives, and create tools that lower barriers to participation. Their work represents infrastructure's newest dimension: scaffolding that fosters visibility, access, and alignment across a decentralized field.



**Perhaps the most important change in the infrastructure for collective giving over the last five years has been the creation of Philanthropy Together and Grapevine.**

- Funder

By reducing duplication, aligning communication, and scaling adaptable frameworks, catalysts strengthen the connective infrastructure of the movement. They curate shared tools, convene practitioners, and translate emerging lessons into usable practice. These systems evolve through collective input, reflecting how the field's collaborative DNA is co-created, flexible, and grounded in community feedback.

Hosts and networks can also act in a catalyzing capacity, such as by creating and open-sourcing resources and materials to expand knowledge or starting new giving circles in specific communities. For example, Amplifier, powered by the Jewish Federation of North America, developed a handbook and dozens of toolkits and sample guidelines to follow in the early 2010s to expand knowledge about how to start and run a giving circle. These materials were viewed by tens of thousands of people, both within and beyond the Jewish community. Another example occurred between 2011 and 2015, when Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy (AAPIP) ran a national campaign that helped launch 50 giving circles within Asian American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander communities nationwide. As described in an evaluative report, the effort “developed out of AAPIP’s work in challenging mainstream philanthropy to be more inclusive and equitable in their giving to the AANHPI community, while stimulating a broader discussion about who gets to participate in philanthropy” (SSG Research & Evaluation, 2017, p. 3).

Analysis of the *In Abundance* group survey shows that both race/ethnicity-focused and gender-focused collective giving groups offer substantial learning and engagement opportunities. Participation levels generally range from 40% to 60% across activities in these giving groups. Race/ethnicity-focused circles place slightly greater emphasis on speakers and training (58% compared to 45% overall), reflecting a priority on knowledge-building and addressing systemic inequities. Gender-focused circles are somewhat more active in leader meetings (51% compared to 49%), and they show notably higher engagement in volunteering (56% compared to 44%) and networking/social events (60% compared to 40%), consistent with their emphasis on relational solidarity and community connection.

While field catalysts build systems, they also model collaboration. Approaches that include co-designing with circle leaders, sharing open-source resources, and testing new frameworks across contexts help turn infrastructure into an active practice of learning and alignment. They are not owned by any one organization but evolve through shared use and feedback. Infrastructure providers curate resources, coordinate data, and translate emerging lessons into usable practice. The result is a field that learns faster, grows smarter, and stays connected through shared tools. These catalysts align the field's infrastructure without standardizing its spirit.

As these systems evolve, ideas travel more easily between networks. Leaders can borrow what works, improve what doesn't, and scale innovations across context and culture. Together, these catalysts reduce duplication and multiply reach. They allow innovations to travel across regions, while staying grounded in community context. Infrastructure at this scale demonstrates what coordinated growth looks like: movement-building that is decentralized but aligned.

Giving Circle Network Leaders at Greater Giving Summit



## COLLABORATION SPOTLIGHT

# Network Braintrust

Network Braintrust convenes leaders of giving circle networks worldwide to align priorities and take collective action. Facilitated by Philanthropy Together in its role as a field catalyst, Braintrust strengthens coordination across the movement.

This collaboration has enabled rapid response at critical moments. In 2020, following the murder of George Floyd, Braintrust mobilized their networks for a two-part webinar on the State of Racial Justice in Black Communities and accelerated the launch of the Racial Equity Community of Practice, developed in partnership with Philanthropy Together, Community Investment Network, and CommunityBuild Ventures. These efforts paired infrastructure with lived experience, member insight, and trusted relationships.

Braintrust also played a central role in shaping the We Give Summit, the first field-wide convening for collective giving, ensuring content reflected member priorities and amplified participation. Beyond events, Braintrust advances research and advocacy: members co-designed survey instruments for the *In Abundance* study and coordinated distribution to more than 2,000 participants. In 2025, Braintrust issued a joint statement urging circles to support nonprofits under attack.

Together, these efforts show how shared infrastructure, paired with trusted leadership, enables responsiveness and scale across the collective giving field.



NETWORK BRAINTRUST 2024

## Conclusion

Infrastructure accelerates the growth of collective giving, transforming it from scattered local action into a credible, coordinated field. Research turns learning into alignment, ensuring growth is informed by evidence rather than assumption. Public storytelling builds shared identity and legitimacy, making collective giving visible as organized and impactful — from reports like *In Abundance* to events such as the We Give Summit. Field catalysts scale what works by connecting people, tools, and ideas across networks, while infrastructure magnifies the work of networks by coordinating their efforts and creating shared spaces for collaboration. Together, these systems make the movement coherent and legible at scale, laying the foundation for broader access and deeper inclusion. This sets the stage for Finding 3, which examines how infrastructure expands equity and participation across who gives, who leads, and whose communities benefit.

American Muslim Community Foundation



## FINDING 3

# Infrastructure Expands Access and Broadens Participation

Access is where the promise of collective giving becomes real. The movement's strength lies not only in who participates but in how easily people can enter, lead, and belong. Infrastructure transforms goodwill into access by removing barriers, providing scaffolding, and embedding equity into the systems that shape participation. When systems carry fairness, when learning reinforces inclusive and trust-based philanthropic practice, and when networks sustain belonging, philanthropy shifts from invitation to participation, and generosity becomes a shared civic practice rather than a privilege. Finding 3 examines three ways infrastructure expands access and inclusion: by creating pathways for underrepresented philanthropists to participate, by equipping new leaders and circles with training and systems that embed equity into practice, and by sustaining culturally rooted networks that cultivate belonging, identity, and shared leadership in collective giving.

### **3.1. Infrastructure creates inclusive pathways for underrepresented philanthropists to participate.**

One of the clearest contributions of infrastructure is its ability to lower barriers to participation. Collective giving has always existed in community practice, yet many groups lacked the administrative, financial, or technological tools to sustain themselves within formal philanthropic systems. For underrepresented donors and grassroots leaders, the challenge was never motivation; it was access. Infrastructure closes that gap. By removing legal hurdles, creating user-friendly platforms, and reframing who belongs in philanthropy, it has expanded the number and diversity of people able to participate meaningfully in collective giving.

Hosts, networks, and field catalysts work together to translate generosity from community tradition into recognized philanthropy. For many identity-based circles and smaller community groups, these supports make participation feasible for the first time. They allow leaders to focus on relationships, cultural leadership, and strengthening local impact instead of being consumed by operational logistics. In many communities, hosts also serve as bridges between lived experience and institutional philanthropy — translating across worlds, keeping generosity close to home, and opening doors to collaboration and learning.

Infrastructure makes entry points visible and accessible. Individual-facing tools such as the Global Giving Circle Directory lower barriers to participation by helping people identify giving circles aligned with their geography, identity, and areas of interest (Global Giving Circle Directory, n.d.). Initiatives such as Community Investment Network’s *Philanthropist Rising*, launched in 2016 to mentor and inspire college students and community youth, create pathways for the next generation of philanthropists (Community Investment Network, n.d.). The American Muslim Community Foundation’s #MuslimPhilanthropy podcast elevates Muslim-led giving (American Muslim Community Foundation, n.d.), and the Latino Giving Circle Network’s expansion beyond California mobilizes Latino donors through culturally resonant collective giving (Castro, 2024). These initiatives, and others from women-led, LGBTQ+, Jewish, and Asian groups, illustrate how infrastructure honors cultural traditions while connecting participants to a wider ecosystem of peers and partners.



**I just kind of stepped back and looked and thought we’re missing women of color. We’re missing young professional women. We’re missing single moms, working moms, like this group represents just one layer of women that exist within our metro area. And so, we are really starting to identify those different groups within our giving circle that we need to be engaged, particularly our young professional women.**

- Giving circle leader

Latino Giving Circle Network® // Photo Credit: Bryan Patrick Photography



This perspective underscores that the philanthropists who are “missing” reflect a traditionally-narrow view of who counts as a philanthropist — a view infrastructure helps correct by bringing visibility to their generosity through identity-based networks, inclusive training cohorts, and messages that reframe participation. Infrastructure creates multiple pathways for new participants to see themselves in the work and to participate fully. For many, this shift is transformative.

“

**I didn't think I was a donor until I joined my circle. I realized my contribution mattered because it was part of something bigger.**

- Giving circle leader

These inclusive pathways broaden who participates and make belonging visible and durable. They affirm that generosity is measured not by wealth but by participation, connection, and shared purpose. By turning identity and lived experience into recognized sources of legitimacy, infrastructure ensures that collective giving lifts up the assets, generosity, and leadership already present in every community. Infrastructure expands who is seen, and who sees themselves, as a philanthropist.

CircleUp Chicago // Photo Credit: Ana Miyeres



## NARRATIVE SPOTLIGHT

# The Big We and Collective Belonging

Hali Lee's *The Big We: How Giving Circles Unlock Generosity, Strengthen Community, and Make Change* (Sweet July Books, 2025) offers a passionate and eloquent account of the growth of the giving circle movement. Written as a narrative memoir, it blends Lee's own experience founding the Asian Women Giving Circle with stories from groups across the country and insightful analysis of philanthropy as a whole. She highlights how collective giving reclaims philanthropy as something rooted in everyday practice, community, and relationships, rather than an activity reserved for the wealthy few.

Describing the "wonder of giving circles," she writes:

Imagine the power that could be unleashed if we reconnected to our cultural heritages of helping our neighbors in order to contribute to the civic square. Imagine the power of people getting together in living rooms across the country, putting their minds and hearts together to address local issues, all while breaking bread, sharing a meal, and building community. (Lee, 2025, p. xx)

*The Big We* demonstrates that movement-building is as much about storytelling as it is about data. Memoir and narrative affirm the meaning of collective giving, helping people see themselves as part of something larger. In doing so, Lee's book strengthens the movement's infrastructure by expanding visibility, inspiring participation, and ensuring that collective giving is recognized as both a powerful practice and a vibrant cultural force.



### 3.2. Infrastructure equips new leaders and circles with training and systems that embed philanthropic equity.

Every circle begins with a few people who want to make change together, but sustaining that intention requires structure. Infrastructure provides the scaffolding that helps new leaders turn vision into viable practice. Training programs, peer learning cohorts, and practical tools help circles launch with confidence rather than uncertainty. These programs shorten the learning curve for new leaders, embedding shared values and consistent practices from the start.

One example is Launchpad, a free, online program offered by Philanthropy Together for anyone starting or hosting a giving circle (Philanthropy Together, n.d.-a). As one leader noted, “There’s no way I would have started a circle without Philanthropy Together’s Launchpad. It gave me the language, the tools, and the community to feel like this was possible.”

Infrastructure goes beyond training to model equity in action. Launchpad offers both practical steps like deciding on the circle’s structure, focus, and values and also decisions around how the groups finds, decides on, and engages with nonprofits receiving the collective gift. Templates, scripts, and community coaching opportunities help circles adopt trust-based practices from the start. (Philanthropy Together, n.d.-b). Their aim is to create accountability and trust, positioning circles as a model for democratic decision-making that helps community members practice valuable civic skills.



**The intention behind the giving is what’s most important to me. And I feel like grassroots regular people from all walks of life can help us transform the field of philanthropy and make it more about healing and love and bringing this country back together.**

- Infrastructure leader

This vision underscores that, beyond being procedural, equity systems aim to restore trust and connection across communities.

Equity takes shape through practical systems: simplified grant applications, shared decision dashboards, and streamlined reporting requirements. Communities closest to the issues have long practiced forms of collective giving and mutual aid, but sustaining that engagement requires infrastructure that embeds fairness into everyday practice: how funds are managed, how circles interact with nonprofits, and how relationships are built.



**It’s not enough to say we’re equitable. The process has to show it — who gets heard, how decisions are made, and whether the money follows community priorities.**

- Infrastructure leader

When equity is structural, it builds trust, deepens belonging, and redistributes power alongside dollars. Infrastructure transforms equity from an aspiration into an operating principle, ensuring leadership, resources, and impact remain grounded in the communities that create them, and demonstrating how philanthropy can evolve into a more just and participatory practice.

One example of infrastructure making equity operational is the *Trust-Based Philanthropy Explained* guide, which was co-developed for giving circles.

## FRAMEWORK SPOTLIGHT

# Trust-Based Philanthropy Explained (for Giving Circles)

The Trust-Based Philanthropy Project and Philanthropy Together co-developed a guide specifically for collective giving groups to build on the momentum of moving funders toward trust-based philanthropy practice (Trust-Based Philanthropy Project, n.d.). The guide helps giving circles rethink how they show up in their communities by rooting their work in trust, equity, and shared power. It encourages groups to look honestly at their values, culture, leadership, and structures, and to notice where traditional grantmaking practices may unintentionally create barriers or reinforce power imbalances. The tool offers practical ways to simplify processes, build authentic relationships, listen to community voices, and support organizations beyond writing a check. Overall, it's designed to help circles shift from transactional habits to a more relational, collaborative approach that strengthens impact and deepens connection with the communities they care about.



### 3.3. Infrastructure sustains culturally rooted networks that cultivate belonging, identity, and equitable leadership in collective giving.

Infrastructure sustains culturally rooted practices that make philanthropy authentic and connected to community traditions. Just as infrastructure embeds equity into systems, it also ensures belonging is grounded in longstanding traditions of generosity and care. Identity-based networks have been central to collective giving from the start. Networks such as the Community Investment Network (CIN), the Latino Giving Circle Network (LGCN), and Amplifier’s Jewish values-based circles make philanthropy feel resonant and reflective of the communities they serve.



**What stays with me is the sense of what we’re building together — changing community narratives, creating spaces for professional development, and, through collective giving, forming a kind of sisterhood that lifts each other up.**

– Funder

Infrastructure strengthens these networks by providing coordination, convening, and resources that keep people connected across geography and identity. By resourcing culturally grounded networks, infrastructure turns belonging into durable practice and enables participants to act as donors, organizers, and movement builders. In contrast to traditional philanthropy’s hierarchical, disconnected norms, it preserves traditions of giving while creating conditions for new leadership to emerge. Rather than simply inviting people to give money, collective giving activates civic engagement and deeper participation, enabling self-determination and community-driven leadership.

Belonging links equity to leadership. When networks sustain belonging, they generate leadership pipelines rooted in culture, language, and lived experience. Representation becomes structural, not symbolic. Leaders emerging from these networks bring community priorities and accountability with them, reshaping philanthropy from within rather than adapting to its norms.



**Culturally, Latinas are raised to be very compassionate and help our neighbors who are sick and give all of ourselves... Over the last 10 years, it’s been empowering to be able to give collectively and have a voice in where those funds go. It meant a lot to me and other members with regards to our leadership development.**

– Giving Circle Leader

Infrastructure enables long-term network sustainability through flexible funding, communication tools, and shared learning. When participants see their values reflected and their leadership affirmed, generosity becomes a source of identity and power. Grounded in cultural continuity and community agency, these networks make belonging visible and leadership durable. In doing so, they turn philanthropy into a practice of solidarity, connecting leadership to lived experience and anchoring it in community priorities.

Lacuna Giving Circle



## NETWORK PROFILE

# Community Investment Network (CIN): a Network Advancing Collective Giving in Communities of Color

Founded in 2003, CIN was formed by two giving circles in North Carolina and Alabama that harnessed their collective giving experience to intentionally support and grow giving circles across the American South, with a focus on community challenges and civic participation. From its founding, CIN has supported giving circles led by and for Black communities while expanding to support additional identities and communities of culture.

As of 2024, CIN supports collective giving across the United States, with active circles in the Northeast, South, and Midwest. Membership spans multiple generations, issue areas, and professional backgrounds, yet is unified by a shared commitment to community-rooted philanthropy. While each circle's impact looks different, CIN members contribute financial resources, volunteer time, and mentorship that strengthen communities and expand local leadership.

Across its network, CIN elevates community-driven priorities and nurtures local leadership pipelines by resourcing people closest to the issues. Member circles invest in nonprofits and initiatives in multiple focus areas, reflecting the diversity and depth of giving traditions across communities. CIN actively broadens who sees themselves as a philanthropist, affirming long-standing cultural practices of mutual aid and generosity.

Through this work, CIN demonstrates how culturally grounded collective giving nurtures belonging, drives equity, and deepens civic participation (Community Investment Network, n.d.). Over more than two decades, its growth underscores a powerful truth: communities have always been generous, and with the right infrastructure, that generosity fuels enduring leadership and systemic change.

COMMUNITY INVESTMENT NETWORK'S PHILANTHROPY RISING INITIATIVE



**CIN is a perfect example of that commitment beyond the funding... to do it for the Black community.**

- Funder

## Conclusion

Taken together, these dimensions show how infrastructure makes inclusion durable. Access depends on systems that make participation possible, equitable, and meaningful over time. When people see themselves reflected in philanthropy, when leadership emerges from community voice, and when networks sustain belonging, collective giving becomes a model of equity in action. Infrastructure redesigns who philanthropy serves, how it learns, and who leads it forward. In doing so, it ensures that inclusion is not a temporary opening, but a lasting shift in how generosity, leadership, and power are shared.

TED 2023 // Photo Credit: TED/Jason Redmond



# Opportunities



The point was... increasing giving around the world by individuals... and in order to do that you need to be investing in systems-level organizations... interventions like policy and data and research and narratives. Those are all big infrastructure efforts that can move the needle for tens of thousands of donors. It's really about leverage... these grants and investments... have enormous leverage because that kind of work supports so many different types of organizations and so many individuals.

– Funder (Victoria Vrana, quoted in *Alliance Magazine*, 2024)

Vrana's observation underscores a central finding of this research: infrastructure is foundational to collective giving. It is the system through which connection, growth, inclusion, and durability are made possible across the field. The task now is to turn this understanding into action. The opportunities that follow identify where focused investment and leadership can most effectively strengthen the ecosystem that sustains collective giving.

## Opportunity 1. Strengthen the connective tissue of the ecosystem.

Collective giving thrives when its relationships are strong. Hosts, networks, platforms, and shared learning environments form the living system that keeps generosity organized, coordinated, and adaptive. The opportunity is to intentionally fund the spaces, tools, and people that sustain connection across geography, identity, and scale. When connection is well supported, the movement gains coherence, resilience, and the capacity to learn together.

- **Leaders** can deepen collaboration by sharing tools, linking circles, and creating more spaces for reflection and exchange.
- **Funders** can fund backbone functions such as hosting, convening, and peer learning that hold the field together.
- **Advocates** can elevate coordination and relationship-building as essential infrastructure rather than administrative overhead.

## Opportunity 2. Fortify the systems that grow legitimacy and visibility.

The systems that support collective giving are already in place. The opportunity now is to strengthen and align this infrastructure, so the movement is easier to see, understand, and engage with across the philanthropic landscape. Infrastructure builds legitimacy by sustaining learning networks, coordinating narratives, and supporting platforms, data, and research that clarify collective giving's value and impact.

- **Leaders** can align messaging, share outcomes, and join storytelling efforts that convey collective impact.
- **Funders** can support research and technology that are grounded in practice and connected across the field.
- **Advocates** can highlight collective giving as a proven model of civic philanthropy that strengthens both communities and institutions.

## Opportunity 3. Lower barriers and expand participation.

The future of collective giving depends on who feels welcomed, included, and supported. Infrastructure lowers barriers by providing operational support, digital tools, learning opportunities, and networks that reflect the cultural and economic diversity of communities. The opportunity is to make participation easier and to fund the giving practices already thriving in communities. When infrastructure widens access, it strengthens the movement and reshapes who is recognized as a philanthropist.

- **Leaders** can create welcoming practices, cultivate culturally-rooted and youth-led circles, and share resources that simplify participation.
- **Funders** can invest in technology, leadership pipelines, and flexible models that expand who can give and lead.
- **Advocates** can lift up the generosity that already exists in communities and emphasize that supporting existing giving practices is essential.

Together, these opportunities show how leaders, funders, and advocates can strengthen the infrastructure that enables collective giving to practice shared leadership, belonging, and trust at scale. By investing in systems that support a more democratic and inclusive approach to generosity, the field not only fortifies collective giving but also strengthens democracy and inclusion. It also offers philanthropy a clear path toward broader participation, deeper accountability, and decision-making grounded in community experience.

# Conclusion

The word infrastructure may sound abstract, yet its role is as vital to the collective giving movement as roots are to a tree. Often unseen, it sustains growth by circulating the nutrients of relationships, knowledge, and collective will. When supported by strong infrastructure, collective giving grows stronger and more resilient — making it more participatory, more equitable, and more reflective of the communities it serves. This growth is what enables collective giving to influence philanthropy as a field, offering a model that inspires engagement and shared leadership.

This study, together with *In Abundance* and *Patterns in the Tapestry*, shows that collective giving weaves generosity and democratic practice together. Circles and networks enable shared decision-making, build local ties, and make philanthropy something done with others rather than for others. In this way, generosity becomes civic participation, reinforcing the idea that participation itself is power.

Collective giving's democratic promise is realized through its processes and outcomes. Where equity and belonging take root, civic identity flourishes. With infrastructure (facilitation tools, decision-making systems, and shared frameworks), members decide together which values guide their work and where their resources flow. These structures do more than support generosity; they turn it into civic practice.

One of the key findings of *In Abundance* was that collective giving groups act as “schools of democracy,” echoing Alexis de Tocqueville’s insight about associations (Lozon-Ceballos & Layton, 2024, p. 23). This conclusion is grounded in members’ self-reported increase in civic engagement as a result of their participation in their collective giving group. Circles offer practice in listening across differences, weighing priorities, and deciding together. Members leave not only recognizing themselves as philanthropists but also prepared to lead in neighborhoods, institutions, and public life.

Infrastructure is what allows this potential to endure. It connects thousands of local efforts and translates trust, care, and learning into systems that sustain accountability and growth. Across hosts, networks, and field catalysts, the pattern is consistent: when infrastructure is supported, collective giving becomes more participatory, more equitable, and more reflective of the communities it serves.

At a moment when civic trust is fragile, collective giving offers a clear model of democracy in action. It demonstrates that participation can be inclusive, shared leadership can function at scale, and difference can strengthen rather than divide. Infrastructure is what makes these practices replicable and durable. This is the larger story this research tells.

**Collective giving is not only reshaping philanthropy. Through infrastructure, it is strengthening the civic fabric on which democracy depends.**

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## Appendix A: Self-Reported Affiliations of Giving Circles

This appendix lists the affiliations reported by respondents to the *In Abundance* report’s group survey (Q5), completed in 2023 (Lozon-Ceballos & Layton, 2024). Categories reflect self-reported relationships and include community foundations, networks, women’s funds, technology platforms, and nonprofits. Inclusion does not imply hosting status as defined in this report. Specifically, some nonprofits listed may serve only as fiscal sponsors, providing legal and financial compliance without the relational or strategic support associated with full hosting. For more information on hosting models, see *Patterns in the Tapestry* (Krause & Layton, 2024), especially Archetype 7: Host-Supporting Groups (pp. 21-22).

Category	Organization
Community Foundation	Arizona Community Foundation
Community Foundation	Baltimore Community Foundation
Community Foundation	California Community Foundation
Community Foundation	Central Florida Foundation
Community Foundation	Chicago Community Trust
Community Foundation	Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque
Community Foundation	Community Foundation of Greater Lafayette
Community Foundation	Community Foundation of Howard County
Community Foundation	Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee
Community Foundation	Community Foundation of New Jersey
Community Foundation	Community Foundation of Northeast Florida (NEFL)
Community Foundation	Community Foundation of Randolph County
Community Foundation	Community Foundation of Sarasota County
Community Foundation	Community Foundation of the Holland/Zeeland Area
Community Foundation	Denver Foundation
Community Foundation	Foundation for the Carolinas
Community Foundation	Giving Project VT (Vermont Community Foundation)
Community Foundation	Greater Kansas City Community Foundation
Community Foundation	Hampton Roads Community Foundation
Community Foundation	Headwaters Foundation for Justice

Community Foundation	Humboldt Area Foundation
Community Foundation	International Community Foundation
Community Foundation	Jewish Community Federation and Endowment Fund (includes San Francisco)
Community Foundation	Jewish Community Foundation of San Diego
Community Foundation	Lapeer County Community Foundation
Community Foundation	Legacy Foundation, Inc.
Community Foundation	Minneapolis Foundation
Community Foundation	New York Community Trust (includes Long Island Division)
Community Foundation	North Star Fund
Community Foundation	Northern Indiana Community Foundation
Community Foundation	Oak Park River Forest Community Foundation
Community Foundation	Rhode Island Foundation
Community Foundation	Rose Community Foundation
Community Foundation	Saginaw Community Foundation
Community Foundation	The Associated: Jewish Federation of Baltimore
Community Foundation	Yampa Valley Community Foundation
Networks/Hosts	100 Who Care Alliance
Networks/Hosts	Amplifier
Networks/Hosts	Awesome Foundation
Networks/Hosts	Community Investment Network (CIN)
Networks/Hosts	Giving Project Network
Networks/Hosts	Honeycomb
Networks/Hosts	Impact100 Global
Networks/Hosts	Latino Giving Circle Network (Latino Community Foundation)
Networks/Hosts	Philanos
Networks/Hosts	Social Venture Partners International (SVPI)
Networks/Hosts	The Funding Network (TFN)
Networks/Hosts	The States Project
Networks/Hosts	Together Women Rise
Nonprofit	AgeOptions
Nonprofit	Asian Pacific Community Fund

Nonprofit	Building Bridges Across the River
Nonprofit	Change We Seek
Nonprofit	Community Leadership, Programs and Granting
Nonprofit	CoThinkk
Nonprofit	Eagle Market Streets Development Corporation
Nonprofit	Economic Opportunity Funders
Nonprofit	GEHA (Government Employees Health Association, Inc.)
Nonprofit	Inspired Women Paying It Forward
Nonprofit	Mercy Corps
Nonprofit	Moore Philanthropy
Nonprofit	Oregon State University Foundation
Nonprofit	Ripple Impact NW
Nonprofit	Sarah Bush Lincoln Health Foundation
Nonprofit	Spur Local (formerly Catalogue for Philanthropy)
Nonprofit	Tealistic
Nonprofit	The Battery
Nonprofit	Think BIG Consulting
Nonprofit	Third Wave Fund
Nonprofit	Valparaiso University
Nonprofit	Working for Women
Nonprofit	World Relief Campaign
Tech Platform	Grapevine
Women's Fund	Chicago Foundation for Women
Women's Fund	Jewish Women's Funding Network
Women's Fund	Ms. Foundation for Women
Women's Fund	Texas Women's Foundation
Women's Fund	Washington Women's Foundation
Women's Fund	Women's Foundation of Alabama
Women's Fund	Women's Fund of Rhode Island
Women's Fund	Women's Impact Network

## Appendix B: Collective Giving Networks – Names and Brief Descriptions

Information reflects data compiled from public sources and network-provided profiles as of January 2026. Numbers and descriptions are time-bound and may change; readers should consult network websites or Philanthropy Together’s Giving Circle Networks page for the most current information. Where scale metrics (such as number of chapters, members, or grants) are included, they are provided to offer an overview of the origins, composition, activities, and scale of collective giving networks.

	<p><b>100 Who Care Alliance</b>          Founded 2014; 800+ global chapters; quick-start model for local impact; flexible structure; each member donates \$100 per quarter; \$59M+ granted to local organizations.</p>
	<p><b>American Muslim Community Foundation</b>          Founded 2016; 2 active giving circles; faith-based; supports Muslim-led giving; \$2.7M+ granted.</p>
	<p><b>Amplifier (Jewish Federations of North America)</b>          Founded 2014; Jewish values-based; hosts giving circle incubators and convenes communities of practice; provides customizable, off-the-shelf resources.</p>
	<p><b>Awesome Foundation</b>          Founded 2009; 65 chapters in 9+ countries; \$1K monthly no-strings attached grants; \$7M+ to 7,000+ projects; open theme of 'awesome'.</p>
	<p><b>Community Investment Network</b>          Founded 2003; 17 circles; Black-led; supports African American and communities of color.</p>
	<p><b>DMV Collective Giving Network</b>          Founded 2019; 20+ circles; based in the Washington, D.C. region; \$10M+ granted to local nonprofits.</p>



### **The Funding Network**

Founded 2002; UK-based; trained and partnered with affiliates in 31 countries; £11.5M (approx. \$15.7M) for 1,317 grassroots nonprofits across 320 live crowdfunding events; members nominate nonprofits.

## **GIVING PROJECT NETWORK**

### **Giving Project Network**

Founded 2014; 7 community-based social justice foundations; cross-race/class cohorts; 2,500+ members; \$21M+ granted to constituent-led, community organizing for systemic change; 23,000 donors.



### **Grapevine**

Founded 2020; launched hundreds of giving circles and hosts thousands more; provides a ready-to-use, internet-based platform requiring minimal setup; offers tools, training, matching campaigns, and ongoing community support; \$48M+ granted to nonprofits.



### **Honeycomb**

Founded 2006; 120+ Jewish youth philanthropy programs; focus on youth leadership and philanthropy education for teens; approx. \$1M granted annually.



### **Impact100**

Founded 2001; 80+ chapters in 4 countries; 100+ women donate \$1,000 each to grant \$100K+ annually to a local cause; \$178M granted.



### **Latino Community Foundation**

Founded 2012; 33 circles launched across California, Arizona, and Nevada; 1,200+ members mobilized; largest Latino philanthropic network in the U.S.; \$3M+ granted to nearly 200 local, Latino-led nonprofits.



### **NEID Global**

Founded 2008; U.S. based with international focus; peer learning network for global giving; 19 annual theme-based giving circles; trust-based approaches; \$1.5M+ granted to 85 organizations in 35+ countries.



### **Philanos**

Founded 2009; 105 affiliates; 22,000+ individual donors; largest women's collective giving network; \$253M granted by circles since 1995.



### **Social Venture Partners International**

Founded 1997; 30 affiliates; 2,100+ donors; \$70M+ in grants plus resources and relationships for lasting impact; supports 900+ nonprofits; equity-driven global-local approach.



### **The States Project**

Founded 2017; 200+ U.S.-focused giving circles pooling resources to help elect state lawmakers in key state legislative chambers around the country; Tens of millions pooled to support building and protecting governing power for state lawmakers.



### **Together Women Rise**

Founded 2003; 1300+ chapters; \$12M+ granted; impact across 106M women, girls, family and community members; focus on women/girls in low-income communities in the Global South; no minimum donation.