



Growing Philanthropy through Giving Circles: Collective Giving and the Logic of Charity

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The emergence of giving circles in the UK and Ireland, where individuals come together to pool resources and collectively support charitable causes, come from a background of growing political interest in expanding philanthropy as a complement to tax-funded welfare systems, especially amid long-term austerity pressures. While philanthropy has traditionally been seen as a voluntary, private act, policymakers have sought to stimulate giving through tax reliefs and other incentives. In this context, giving circles might be promoted as a means of engaging new donors, democratizing philanthropy, and fostering community connection.

The study investigates **whether giving circles in the UK and Ireland is a good tool for growing philanthropy as well as shift the logic of charity to meet the expectations of policy-makers.**

The authors explore whether these groups not only expand the amount of giving but also diversify participation, encourage more strategic giving practices, and help address social needs more effectively. At the same time, the research questions whether the informal, member-driven nature of giving circles might conflict with more professionalized and structured forms of charitable infrastructure.

[#GivingCircles](#) [#CollectiveGiving](#) [#SocialPolicy](#) [#CivicEngagement](#)

Background

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Context



- In recent decades, governments in the UK and Ireland have increasingly looked to philanthropy to help meet increased social needs and supplement shrinking public budgets. **Philanthropy is now framed not just as a private moral choice but also as a potential tool of social policy**, with the hope that it might ease pressure on the welfare state without expanding public expenditure.
- Campaigns like the UK's "Giving Campaign" and Ireland's "One Percent Difference Campaign" signal a shift in governmental thinking—from seeing philanthropy as a purely private matter to positioning it as a partner in delivering public value and addressing complex societal challenges.
- **Giving circles have gained popularity as a potentially more democratic and participatory form of giving**, bringing together donors to decide collectively on funding priorities. These groups are often less formal, more inclusive, and more relational, attracting individuals who might otherwise feel excluded from the mainstream charitable sector.
- The researches identified six types of giving circles in the UK and Ireland; Independent, Mentored, Live Crowd Funding, Hosted, Brokers and Hybrid groups. Of eighty identified giving circles in the mentioned countries, fifty-one were represented or discussed by interviewees.

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Take aways & Learnings



- Interviewees generally reported an increase or expansion in giving, but benefits of giving circles for organisations is not limited to that but also include broader exposure to new networks and potential donors and providing new ways for existing supporters to be more involved with their organisation.
- The structure of the Giving circle seem to **motivate donors to be more engaged and learn more** about the causes and projects that the giving circle chooses to support.
- Donors in giving circles seem to focus more on giving to smaller organisations and to causes and projects where they perceive that their donations can have a more tangible effect. It is also mentioned in the article that **giving circles seem to attract types of donors that typically do not engage in charity to a large extent** (e.g. the less wealthy and young professionals). Maybe part of the explanation to why giving circles attract groups that might not otherwise take part in charity is because it **overcomes common barriers for giving** in certain parts of the population such as lack of knowledge of the causes and/or a sense of donations not having a large effect.
- Some giving circles also highlight the sense of personal empowerment members gain through participation. **The benefits of giving circles, therefore, should be assessed not only by the amount of funding ultimately delivered to beneficiaries, but also by the advantages provided to donors themselves.**
- **Challenges** related to establishing and managing giving circles seem primarily **administrative** from the perspective of organisations hosting them. Conflicts may also arise when multiple giving circles pursue similar goals, potentially resulting in **power struggles over fund allocation**.
- The researchers also posit that **giving circles might not be a good tool for bridging the gap between the logic of government and of charity to reach common goals**, which was one reason for the governments to promote them. As example, giving circles tend not to focus on areas where politicians and policy-makers would like to see more funding.
- Overall, the researchers conclude that **giving circles can make a positive contribution to strengthening philanthropy in the UK and Ireland**, particularly by reaching groups who might otherwise hesitate to participate in charitable giving. In a time when donor bases are shrinking across the Western world, giving circles could help reverse this trend. Furthermore, the benefits for members suggest that **giving circles support not only charitable engagement but also broader societal well-being**.

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