

BEST PRACTICES FOR GIVING CIRCLES

Consider these best practices to help ensure your giving circle's longevity, member satisfaction, and impact in the community.

GOALS AND MISSION

- **Be very clear on the mission and goals** of your giving circle early on, and define what success looks like. Some members may be more interested in learning and socializing together, while others are more interested in maximizing impact.
- **Ensure education and engagement are key goals.** Research suggests that giving circles help participants learn about community organizations and issues and can help to enhance the giving strategy of donors just as much as they can increase giving and impact.

Michelle Savoy, a Toronto Foundation Fundholder, who has started a giving circle says, "It's not about growing the group but about us growing together."

MEMBERSHIP

- **Multi-year commitments** from members, three years or longer, are ideal. This will reduce the burden of additional recruitment and it ensures that members will see their impact.
- Bring in **members from a variety of different backgrounds and areas of expertise** to broaden the diversity, experience, and knowledge of your circle this will also help to ensure the group's sustainability.
- Have **members all start at the same time** or, at minimum, have two times per year for members to join. This makes it easier to track new members and payments.
- The **number of members you have should reflect the goals of your giving circle.** For example, if your primary focus is maximizing impact, a larger membership might be most suitable to ensure more funds are disbursed, while a group with a focus on civic engagement might be best served with a smaller membership.

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MAKING GRANTS

- **Unrestricted, larger, multi-year commitments** are ideal for most community organizations. The greater certainty of larger, multi-year commitments can allow organizations to plan-ahead with more confidence and be nimble to the changing needs of the communities they serve. Your unrestricted funding gives decision-making power back to those that know the issues and needs best. Instead of making many smaller gifts, consider fewer larger gifts and spending more time at the grantees' events, learning about the issues they work on, or spending time in the neighbourhoods they work in.
- **Be okay with supporting "old" programs.** Long-standing programs that are working and have a proven track record are great options for your support. Instead of searching for new or "innovative" programs, consider helping to sustain a program that's already successful.
- **Consider supporting programs that are unique to a community or demographic.** Unique issues can require specific programming, not all programs need to be replicable.
- **Provide funding to small organizations,** working locally, that are often overlooked. There are many organizations doing great work in their communities, yet almost two-thirds (sixty percent) of all resources in the charitable sector in Canada go to just one percent of charities. You can find small but mighty organizations that Toronto Foundation has already vetted in our [Good to Give Guide](#).
- **Take time to establish the grant-making process and ensure members are involved in it.** This will encourage a feeling of ownership and satisfaction.
- **Evaluate success.** Regularly engage in a review process to ensure your giving circle is achieving the desired impact. For example, if your goal is to advance the interests of women, discuss whether that goal is being achieved through your granting strategy. Invite grantees to share their feedback - they may share insights that could help you achieve your goals. Instead of a written report, consider inviting organization leaders to meet with you personally to share their successes and learnings. While it's okay to request some kind of report back from grantees, attaching too many conditions to your funding can exhaust organizations and diminish the impact of your grant.



Find more resources to start your own giving circle on our website.