



Tips,  
Tools and  
Resources for  
Organizers

# Start a Women's Giving Circle

**Giving circles** are a way of organizing many people to give contributions to the same charitable causes. Where one person may not always see the impact of a single donation to a charity, the giving circle method can make a significant impact on a charity through multiple or sustained donations. All you need are members, a financial commitment and a worthy cause.

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# Giving Circles Overview

## The Problem

Nonprofit organizations are reeling from the economy and the good work that they do is in jeopardy. Another problem is that some people want to give but don't believe they can make a difference with a small amount of money.

## The Solution

Women from different backgrounds and professions can become change agents in their community by organizing many contributions, through the giving circle, to select charities. Members not only help to fund different non-profit organizations, they can also choose to offer their time and talent. In return, they build a new, social network and bolster community resources.

## Time Commitment

This varies depending on level of participation. The time commitment may range from as few as eight hours a year for quarterly meeting participation to up to 25 hours a month to lead the giving circle, which would include running monthly meetings, vetting potential donor organizations and organizing community activities.

## Special Considerations

This volunteer activity can be done by anyone. All that is needed is passion and the commitment to make a difference.

## Who Can Do This?

Most giving circles are groups of women who are grounded in a tradition of volunteerism and sharing. These women bring a legacy of community engagement and welcome all who are interested in contributing. Giving circles can be small and informal – a neighborhood potluck, for instance – with a few people pooling their money and giving it to a chosen charity or they can be highly organized and involve contributions of thousands of dollars and demonstrate a commitment of many years.

## Great Reasons To Do This Project

Women can become change agents in their community with a small contribution of time and money.



**A woman is the full circle. Within her is the power to create, nurture and transform.”**

**–diane mariechild**

# How to Set Up a Giving Circle

## 1 Determine if you want to join an existing giving circle or develop a giving circle of your own.

The Giving Circle Network lists more than 250 giving circles that give largely to local communities [www.givingcircles.org](http://www.givingcircles.org) or consider starting a giving circle of your own.

## 2 Determine the cause(s) and establish your mission.

Since giving circles are democratically arranged, they provide donors with an equal voice in deciding where their contributions go. Think about the causes that stir your passion, and then chat with community organizers with direct experience for ideas on how the giving circle can make a positive change.

Start simply with a single charity or designate a general category, such as faith-based charities, inner city youth, seniors or the poor and needy. Most small giving circles find worthy causes on their own; some larger giving circles invite charities to apply for contributions. The attached tip sheet on *Questions to Ask Charities* may help you select a viable charity.

## 3 Find members and create work groups.

Select a group of your friends, co-workers, neighbors or family members who may share a common interest, explain the concept of a giving circle and invite them to attend a first meeting to see if they'd like to participate. Set a date to host the meeting so you can set up the circle's structure.



### Considerations might include:

- The kinds of charities the circle would like to support
- The financial and time commitments everyone is willing to make
- Meeting guidelines and schedule
- Group roles (leader, scribe, event organizer, liaison with charity, treasurer, etc.)
- Name of the giving circle

## HOW TO SET UP A GIVING CIRCLE, continued

The group may be as informal or as organized as everyone likes; remember that everyone has an equal voice.

And make sure there is time for socializing too! Giving circles are a fun way to meet new women as well as spending time with old friends.

### 4 **Manage the money.**

The simplest way to manage the funds is for each member to write a personal check to the selected charity. Then you can present the set of checks together so the charity can track where the support came from.

### 5 **Evaluate the impact.**

Set milestones for your short-term and long-term goals on a regular basis. It is motivating to see exactly how your contributions can make a difference – in your community at large, and in the lives of individuals. Learn more [www.givingcircles.org](http://www.givingcircles.org).

### 6 **Stay inspired and inspire others.**

Visit [www.createthegood.org](http://www.createthegood.org) to see what others are doing and take a moment to post and share your own group's success.

# Resources and Tools

## Giving Circles Network

[www.givingcircles.org](http://www.givingcircles.org)

GCN provides a forum, resources, knowledge base, and communication and organizational tools so giving circle participants can identify and coordinate with others who have common giving goals, and ultimately enhance the impact [www.givingcircles.org](http://www.givingcircles.org) level, scope and depth of giving. AARP Create The Good® encourages everyone to make a difference in the lives of others. Share your experiences with this activity and find other ways to help in your community at [www.CreateTheGood.org](http://www.CreateTheGood.org).

## Sample Checklists and Documents

[www.givingforum.org](http://www.givingforum.org)

These forms are provided by the Forum of Regional Association of Grant Makers, specifically for giving circles and include by-laws, site visit checklists, reports and more.

## Guidestar

[www2.guidestar.org](http://www2.guidestar.org)

Guidestar offers comprehensive, up-to-date information available on more than 1.8 million nonprofits.

## Charity Navigator

[www.charitynavigator.org/](http://www.charitynavigator.org/)

This site helps donors find charities they can trust. As America's premier independent charity evaluator, they work to advance a more efficient and responsive philanthropic marketplace by evaluating the financial health of more than 5,400 of America's largest charities.

## RESOURCES AND TOOLS, continued

### American Institute of Philanthropy

[www.charitywatch.org](http://www.charitywatch.org)

AIP is a nonprofit charity watchdog and information service that provides donors with the information they need to make more informed giving decisions.

### Charitable Giving Calculator

[www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org)

Find out your tax savings and how much you can afford to give. Simply enter the amount you'd like to give and your federal tax bracket into the calculator to display the net cost of the donation and your tax savings.

### An AARP Giving Circle Case Study

[www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org)

This video shows how a group of inspired women in a giving circle spreads the wealth. This particular giving circle earmarked their donations to the AARP Foundation's Women's Scholarship Program, [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org) which provides scholarships to women over 40 who want to get the education they need to re-enter the workforce or obtain better employment. To date, more than 235 women from every walk of life have benefited from the program. The women also supported the AARP Foundation [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org) which provides programs that help seniors remain independent and self-reliant. This charitable arm of AARP offers critically needed programs and services to those having difficulty meeting their basic health and financial needs in the second half of life. Last year, these services helped more than 5.2 million people.

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create the  
**good**  
-AARP

# Reports and Articles

## *Giving Circles Knowledge Center*

[www.givingforum.org](http://www.givingforum.org)

## *More Giving Together: The Growth and Impact of Giving Circles and Shared Giving.*

[www.givingforum.org](http://www.givingforum.org) - Click on "Giving Circles," and then on "Giving Circles" Trend Report.

## *Philanthropic Giving By and For Women on the Rise, Study Finds*

[www.abagmd.org](http://www.abagmd.org)

## *Small Scale Philanthropy*

[www.southcoasttoday.com](http://www.southcoasttoday.com)

## *Foundation Organizes Giving Circle*

[www2.snow.com](http://www2.snow.com)

## *The Power of Giving: Women's Giving Circles in Maryland*

[www.marylandlife.com](http://www.marylandlife.com)

NOTES: SOURCES: AARP

# Women's Giving Circles Tip Sheet

## Questions to Ask Charities Before Donating

*based on questions from Charity Navigator*

### 1 Can your charity clearly communicate who they are and what they do?

If a charity struggles to articulate its mission and its programs, it may struggle to deliver those programs. If a charity can't explain who it is and what it does, and why it is needed, find one that can. The stakes are too high and too many good organizations exist that know exactly who they are, what they do and why they are needed.

### 2 Can your charity define their short-term and long-term goals?

Organizations without quantifiable goals have no way to measure success. Select a charity that knows what they are working toward. Determine if the organization is working toward its goals in a way that seems rational and productive to you.

### 3 Can your charity tell you the progress it has made (or is making) toward its goal?

Ask your organization what it has done to make the issue it confronts better. What are its results? Ask for real stories and real proof.

### 4 Do your charity's programs make sense to you?

If you support the mission of an organization, ask yourself if its programs also make sense. You believe in the cause, and you hope for the best end result, but is the organization working toward that goal with a method that makes sense to you? Just because you support the ends doesn't mean you support the means.

## WOMEN'S GIVING CIRCLES TIP SHEET, continued

### 5 Can you trust your charity?

Research from Charity Navigator [www.charitynavigator.org](http://www.charitynavigator.org) has shown that the majority of charities in the United States are responsible, honest and well-managed. You need to give with confidence. Use Charity Navigator, or another unbiased source to gather data so you will be comfortable with the organization. If you have time, check with the IRS or your state attorney general's office. Call the president of the organization and ask the questions you need answered before you can be assured that this is a good use of your money. Ask for an annual report.

### 6 Are you willing to make a long-term commitment to this organization?

Intelligent giving is motivated by altruism, knowledge and perspective, not a knee-jerk reaction to a television commercial. Is your charity the type of organization to which you're willing to make a long-term commitment? Look hard and find an organization you can support for many years. When you find that charity, give it your dollars, tell it you'll be there through thick and thin and then continue to support it. Only then will long-term sustainable change take place.

*Brought to you by AARP Create The Good® Small actions. Big results.*

*Find ways to help in your community at [CreateTheGood.org](http://CreateTheGood.org).*