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Understanding Philanthropy in Times of Crisis: The Role of Giving Back During COVID-19

Researched and Written By
Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy



Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy

The Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy is dedicated to improving philanthropy to improve the world by training and empowering students and professionals to be innovators and leaders who create positive and lasting change. The school offers a comprehensive approach to philanthropy through its academic, research, and international programs and through The Fund Raising School, Lake Institute on Faith & Giving, Mays Family Institute on Diverse Philanthropy, and Women's Philanthropy Institute.

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Contents

Introduction	4	Part 2. Corporate Philanthropy in 2020	29
Key Takeaways	5	Methodology	30
Background	6	Findings	30
Part 1. Individual Philanthropy in 2020	11	Discussion	36
Methodology	12	Conclusion	37
Data from CDC Foundation	13	References	38
Data from Charity Navigator.....	14		
Data from Global Impact.....	15		
Findings	17		
Discussion	28		

Introduction

The COVID-19 global pandemic and associated health, economic, and social effects have profoundly impacted multiple aspects of philanthropic giving. Based on newly collected data, this report supplies key insights into who, how, and why individuals and corporations in the United States gave during the early stages of the pandemic through the end of 2020.

Individuals and corporations have faced decisions about when and how to give under economic uncertainty, lockdowns, social distancing measures, and mounting pressure about societal and workplace inequities. They have also supported vaccine research and production. Nonprofits, likewise, have innovated virtual functions and altered their fundraising approaches, volunteer opportunities, and client services in response to the health and economic impacts of the pandemic.

For individuals, corporations, and nonprofit institutions, the long-term effects of the pandemic are still unfolding. However, by examining the pandemic's short- and mid-term effects, the report provides vital information to donors and nonprofits for planning and adaptation.

Research Questions

This research provided new insights into how Americans have approached the pandemic. The main questions are as follows:

1. How did individuals give in response to the unprecedented health and economic crises associated with COVID-19?
2. How did corporations give in response to the unprecedented health and economic crises associated with COVID-19?

Key Takeaways

Based on results from both quantitative and qualitative research using multiple sources, Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy (hereinafter referred to as “the school”) identified ten key takeaways about individual and corporate giving in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Individual Giving:

1. Americans have maintained their commitment to charitable giving throughout the pandemic, with some notable exceptions.
2. Donors who gave to COVID-related causes often indicated that other people can be trusted and were more motivated to strive for the wellbeing of others and society.¹
3. End-of-year giving made up a larger portion of giving in 2020 than in the previous two years.
4. Nonprofit subsectors directly related to responding to the pandemic, such as human services, health, and public-society benefit, saw significant increases in donations.
5. The characteristics of donors to COVID-related causes appear similar to general patterns in giving to charitable causes more broadly.
6. Innovation and digital adaptation were vital to meeting new demands during COVID-19.

Corporate Giving:

1. Corporations responded to the increased health demands imposed by COVID-19 with increased giving and multi-year pledges.
2. The commitment of corporate philanthropy to health causes is distinct from other types of donors.
3. Finance and insurance companies dominated U.S. corporate giving to COVID-19 relief in 2020.
4. Corporations (that participated in interviews with the school) adapted their workplace giving programs in response to COVID-19, with a heavy reliance on technology.

¹ This finding is based on a limited sample from the September survey only and not intended for broad application.

Background

Since March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has uprooted everyday norms, shattered economies, and impacted people worldwide at an unprecedented level.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been compared to a large-scale catastrophe such as a war or revolution (Macmillan, 2020). It is distinguished from other disasters and crises like Hurricanes Katrina and Harvey by its global scale and longevity. Nearly 19 months in, the COVID-19 pandemic has claimed the lives of more than 700,000 Americans² (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2021). During the early months of the pandemic, public health experts identified large gatherings, crowded workplaces, schools, and public places as contributing factors to the spread of COVID-19 (Schuchat, 2020). A series of lockdowns and mitigation protocols ensued and disrupted daily routines. The U.S. economy experienced shocks and extreme fluctuations, resulting in a GDP decline, widespread furloughs of workers, heightened food insecurity, and the decline of small business revenue (Bauer et al., 2020).

In addition, COVID-19 exposed existing disparities and exacerbated underlying social problems (Bernholz, 2021). Critical conversations have called into question the intertwined role of philanthropy, business, and government, including how inequities from one sector spill over into another. Criticisms include the

disproportionate ways in which marginalized communities have been impacted by the pandemic, resulting in at least one study on the impact of the pandemic on immigrant communities (Clark et al., 2020).

Innovation and ingenuity have become lifelines during the pandemic. In a global study of nonprofits, 97% of respondents adapted to the challenges faced by COVID-19, including 92% who began using more digital technology in their everyday work (CAF America et al., 2021). Adaptations included remote work and volunteering, virtual galas, outdoor gatherings, video calls and conferences, and asynchronous offerings. The arts and culture subsector faced serious hurdles despite creative maneuvers because of the nature of experiential events and organizational dependence on the earned revenue of live events that didn't translate well online (Guibert & Hyde, 2021). For religious congregations, the findings were more nuanced. Overall, the relationship between in-person giving and reduced in-person attendance was associated with an early decline in giving to a plurality of religious institutions (Lake Institute on Faith and Giving, 2020). With the use of technology, creativity, and federal funding, some congregations were able to rebound, although these findings varied at individual institutions.

² The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, November, 2021

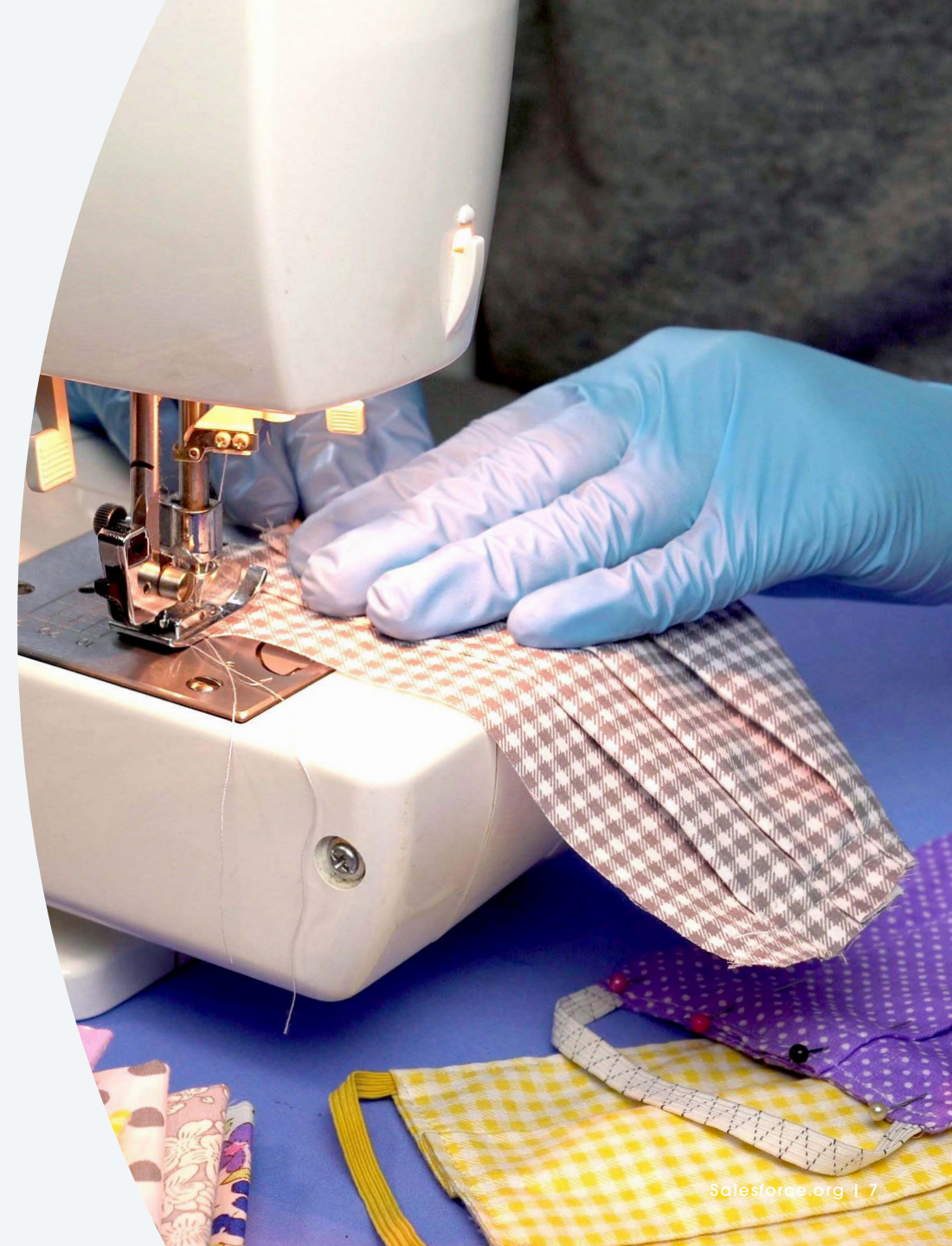
An expansion in generosity, including online giving, has accompanied a year of unprecedented events and challenges. A study of donors and crowdfunding that was conducted early in the pandemic indicated donors were more likely to make an online gift if they believed in the mission or their ability to make a difference (Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, 2021).

Informal acts of generosity have also been widespread. Masks were sewn and gifted to healthcare workers (Enrich et al., 2020), carryout orders supported local restaurants, and socially distanced applause and honks celebrated healthcare workers during shift changes (Hardcastle, 2020). While the breadth of this type of giving during a crisis has been impossible to capture in its entirety, research organizations, including the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU), have developed living projects to collectively document stories of informal giving during COVID-19 (ISPU, n.d.).

Communities have indeed displayed support for one another during the pandemic. Giving and receiving among individuals is long understood to promote trust (Putnam, 2000), a theory that continues to be understood during a crisis. Researchers have also explored how shared

group identity promotes helping others and local resiliency (Drury et al., 2020; Stevenson et al., 2021). Spontaneous group actions to meet the needs of neighbors have been witnessed across the country. For instance, an organic coalition of volunteers came together in support of a homeless camp in the Santa Clara River Bottom in California. They hiked long distances to share food, aid, and technical support with camp residents (Rivers, 2020). And neighborhoods across the United States found social connectedness through window teddy bear hunts (McCluskey, 2020).

Many corporations have also shown generosity, flexibility, and creativity during the pandemic. There was a surge in corporate giving to COVID-19 relief in 2020 and considerable attention dedicated to corporate philanthropy during the pandemic. Responses included flexible funding parameters, such as extended grant periods and the ability to redirect funds to areas of greatest need (PND, 2020). At least 38 corporations adopted the Open COVID Pledge (Open COVID Pledge, n.d.) to supply free access to intellectual property to respond to and tackle the pandemic effectively. Numerous corporations, including Starbucks and North Face, have offered first-responder and healthcare-worker discounts (Anderson, 2021).



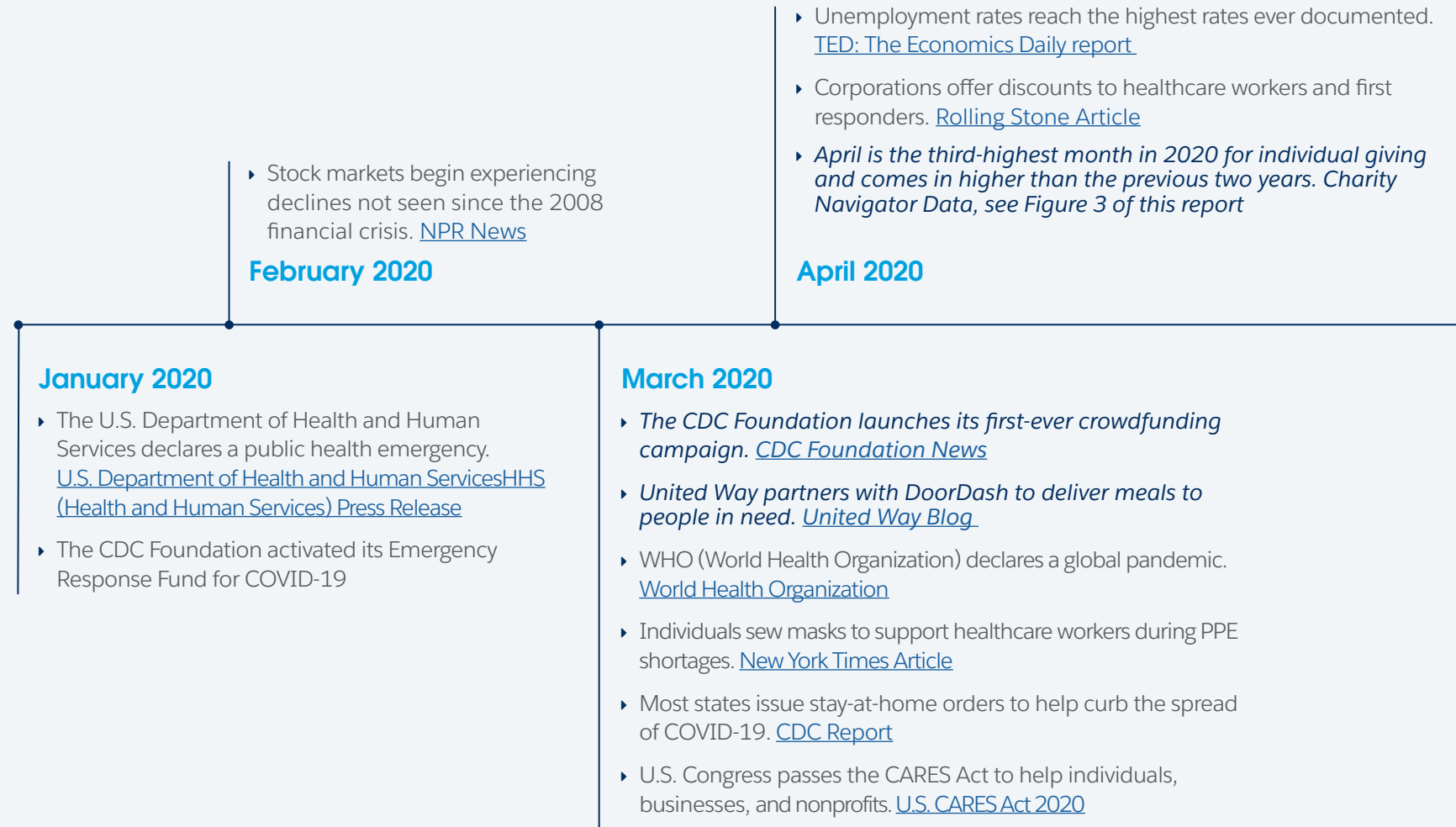


During the pandemic, corporations have demonstrated flexibility in workplace giving programs, which are often recognized for their beneficial impact on employee recruitment, satisfaction, and turnover. With remote work as a prolonged pandemic reality, technology played an important role in pivoting workplace giving. The movement to use online giving platforms preceded the pandemic. According to *Evolution of Workplace Giving*, new ways of giving were important to accommodate the changing demographics and values of employees (Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, 2018). For example, Salesforce.org Philanthropy Cloud, a workplace giving and volunteering platform, facilitated employee donations, and Momentive (previously known as SurveyMonkey) elicited with anonymity the needs of all employees (Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, 2020). Digital workplace giving, however, faced some challenges, including building employee engagement and opportunities to enhance relationships (Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, 2020), supporting the need for supplemental opportunities, such as corporate service days and nonprofit partnerships.

Despite some significant corporate pledges and announcements, in overall dollars, corporate giving declined to \$16.88 billion in 2020 compared with \$21.09 billion in 2019. *Giving USA 2021* indicates that corporate giving was affected by declines in aggregate GDP and corporate pretax profits. According to *Giving USA 2021*, corporate giving represented 3.6% of total giving in 2020 – the lowest recorded value in the last 40 years. The second, third, and fifth lowest values came in the three years prior – 2019, 2018, and 2017. However, many large companies expanded their overall giving by announcing pledged gifts as well as sustainability and racial equity commitments.

The closest known historical study of philanthropy during a pandemic is an empirical assessment after the Spanish Flu. This study examined the relationship between cooperative organizations and community resilience in Norway (Rao & Greve, 2018). Thus, the study of philanthropy and giving behavior during a pandemic is nascent. This report provides us with an opportunity to understand how individuals and corporations responded to the effects of COVID-19 in our communities.

COVID-19 Philanthropic Timeline



- ▶ GivingTuesday Now, a new campaign created by GivingTuesday, raises \$503 million to support emergency responses to COVID-19. [Giving Tuesday Now](#)
- ▶ *The Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy conducts a national survey on household giving priorities and motivations.*

May 2020

- ▶ Stock markets show signs of solid recovery, a trend that continues for the rest of 2020. [NPR Article](#)

August 2020

- ▶ GivingTuesday witnesses an unprecedented level of giving, with a 29% increase in donors and a 25% increase in giving, for a total of \$2.47 billion. [GivingTuesday Blog](#)

November 2020

July 2020

- ▶ A coalition of volunteers comes together to provide food, aid, and services to homeless neighbors in the Santa Clara River Bottom in California. [VC Reporter](#)
- ▶ MacKenzie Scott announces donations totaling \$1.7 billion to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), women's rights organizations, and LGBT organizations. [New York Times](#) and [MacKenzie Scott Blog](#)

September 2020

- ▶ The Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy conducts a second national survey on household giving priorities and motivations.

December 2020

- ▶ *December dominates year-end giving more than usual, generating 64% of total annual giving. [Charity Navigator Data](#), see [Figure 3 of this report](#)*
- ▶ FDA (Food and Drug Administration) approves emergency use authorization of the first COVID-19 vaccine. [FDA News Release](#)

Part 1

Individual Philanthropy in 2020



Methodology

National Surveys

To address the first question about individual giving, the school conducted and examined two comprehensive national surveys on household giving priorities and motivations. This report publicly compares data from these two surveys for the first time. The surveys explored the impact of COVID-19–related factors upon charitable giving, including social distancing and lockdowns, COVID-19 infection of friends and family, and uncertainty about economic impacts. In addition, the surveys asked about motivational factors for giving to COVID-19–related causes.

The first survey on U.S. household charitable decision-making included 3,499 respondents and was fielded online in mid-May 2020.³ It built upon previous studies, including the 2005 survey instrument used in the Philanthropy Panel Study (PPS). The sample was nationally representative and was weighted based on Census Population Survey data, using age, income, race, ethnicity, and geographic location. The second survey was fielded through the AmeriSpeak panel by NORC in September 2020.⁴ The final sample included 1,535 adults and was weighted to ensure a nationally representative sample.

The comparisons between the two household surveys illuminated giving behavior throughout the pandemic. We learned how people gave during the early months of the pandemic compared with later in the year, as some concerns settled in about the health and economic uncertainties of the pandemic.

Data Partners

Additionally, the school partnered with three national organizations, the CDC Foundation, Charity Navigator, and Global Impact, to understand donation-level data during the pandemic. These datasets provided demographic and financial trends present during the early months of the pandemic. Along with the two surveys, the national donation-level data offered dynamic insights into individual choices, including how donors gave and how their gifts were captured.

- Data from the CDC Foundation provided insights into individual gifts through innovative fundraising channels and approaches during the pandemic.
- Charity Navigator provided new insights into specific subsector-level data collected through its platform on all demographic data of donors and gift recipients.
- Global Impact provided new insights about gender’s role in giving during the pandemic.

³ Results from the first survey on U.S. household charitable giving decision-making are available in *Women Give 2021: How Households Make Giving Decisions* (2021), published by The Women’s Philanthropy Institute at the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy.

⁴ Results from the second survey on U.S. household charitable giving decision-making are available in *Charitable Crowdfunding: Who Gives, to What, and Why?* (2021) and in *Everyday Donors of Color: Diverse Philanthropy During Times of Change* (2021), both published by the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy.



Data from the CDC Foundation

About the Dataset

The CDC Foundation is a public health-centered nonprofit organization that mobilizes philanthropic resources to support the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, enabling it to address a variety of health challenges during normal time as well as during moments of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Established by Congress as an independent, nonprofit organization, the CDC Foundation is the sole entity authorized by Congress to mobilize philanthropic partners and private-sector resources to support the CDC's critical health protection mission. It received individual, corporate, and foundation donations. The CDC Foundation launched its emergency response for the coronavirus outbreak in January 2020 and then launched a crowdfunding

campaign on the Charidy platform in March 2020 (Croft 2020; Monroe, 2020). By the end of 2020, the fund, "Crush COVID" (previously titled "All of Us: Combat Coronavirus"), had raised nearly \$51 million (Giving USA Foundation, 2021).⁵ In addition, the CDC Foundation received an uptick of donations through its website and social media sites.

The CDC Foundation provided transaction-level and aggregate demographic data for online gifts to the CDC Foundation during the first quarter of the pandemic (March 2020 to June 2020). Gift data included donations made directly through its website and its crowdfunding campaign on Charidy, Facebook, and TikTok.

Strengths

The CDC Foundation embraced changing ways of giving during COVID-19 and used a crowdfunding campaign for the first time. In addition, it received gifts on social media platforms Facebook, TikTok, ActBlue, and Charidy. Notably, ActBlue is more commonly used for political donations than charitable giving. These data include donor demographic information such as gender and geographic region, transaction date, and giving platform.

Limitations

Data from the CDC Foundation are limited by the type of demographic data that were gathered and shared. It is a single source of data, limited to COVID-19-related giving, and thus makes comparisons of non-COVID-19 giving and prior giving difficult. The data also did not include offline giving.

⁵ The Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy research team tracked major crowdfunding campaigns for one year after the onset of the pandemic. Current campaign progress can be found at <https://www.give4cdcf.org/>.



Data from Charity Navigator

About the Dataset

Charity Navigator is an organization that evaluates and rates nonprofits. Charity Navigator provided 2020 transaction data for all gifts made through its platform including donor demographics, such as geographic region, average income, gender, age, and religion; donation amount; donation date; and recipient organization subsector. This data supplemented similar data from previous years provided by Charity Navigator to the school as part of an ongoing research partnership.

Strengths

Charity Navigator offers an online giving platform and works with various organizations across several subsectors. The dataset included detailed demographic information on donors. It also includes recipient organization information, allowing the school to directly assess links among donor characteristics and recipient organization types.

Limitations

Charity Navigator primarily functions as a nonprofit evaluation site; however, it offers a donation button with all nonprofit entries. Since individuals are typically already searching for information on the particular charity, the characteristics and behaviors of donors who give through Charity Navigator may not reflect the more general donor profile. In addition, the overall dollar amount donated through the platform is not large.



Data from Global Impact

About the Dataset

Global Impact is a giving intermediary. It partners with U.S. organizations in the private, public, and nonprofit sectors to raise money for disaster relief and global development. Global Impact provided transaction-level data that included donation amount and donor gender for all 2020 donations.

Strengths

This data helped provide a broad context for the gender breakdown.

Limitations

The sample size for Global Impact was small compared with the other two datasets. It also provided limited demographic information for donors.



Donations by Amount and Size

Dataset	No. of Donations	Total \$	Mean Donation	Median Donation
Charity Navigator**	163,773	\$22,103,921	\$135	\$50
CDC Foundation	111,714	\$5,753,567	\$52	\$18
Global Impact	1,623	\$288,281	\$178	\$104

Donor Data and Channels* of Giving

Dataset	Gender	Region	Channel	Other Demographics
Charity Navigator**	Y	Y	N	Y
CDC Foundation	Y	Y	Y	N
Global Impact	Y	N	N	N

* “Channels” refers to where the gift was received, such as the mail, website, or third- party platform.

For the CDC Foundation, channels include Facebook, TikTok, ActBlue, and Charidy.

**Sample size representative of Mar. 11 to Dec. 31, 2020 data only

Data Sources: Global Impact, CDC Foundation, and Charity Navigator

Individual Philanthropy in 2020

Finding 1

Americans have maintained their commitment to charitable giving throughout the pandemic with some notable exceptions.

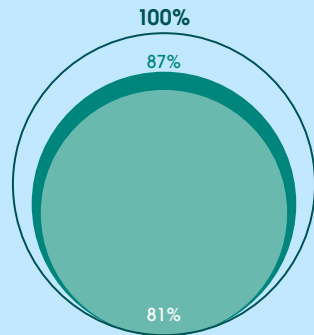
- According to the two surveys conducted by the school, self-reported giving of all types increased four to six percentage points between May and September 2020.
- Giving to human services and health organizations was the most common philanthropic response to the pandemic, with 81% of respondents in May and 87% of respondents in September indicating they maintained or increased their giving to these organizations as a result of the pandemic.
- Informal giving to individuals and businesses at both the local and non-local levels stayed strong between May and September 2020. However, donors had a preference for giving to local individuals and businesses.
- Between May and September 2020, volunteering was sustained, with about three-quarters of surveyed individuals reporting they maintained or increased their volunteering because of the pandemic. More people indicated decreased volunteering than other philanthropic behaviors, suggesting that social distancing and community lockdowns reduced community interaction.
- Data from Charity Navigator suggested that organizations of all sizes experienced similar shifts in contributions.



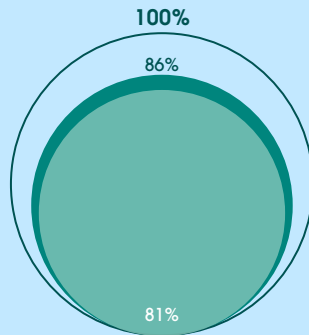
Figure 1. Individual Philanthropic Behavior in Response to COVID-19, 2020

Did You Maintain or Increase Charitable Giving as a Result of the Pandemic?

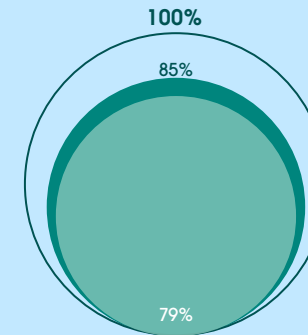
September 2020
May 2020



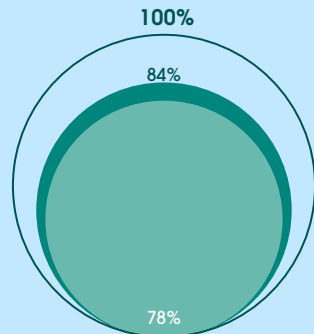
Giving to charitable organizations to help people in need of food, shelter, or other basic necessities; or giving to charitable organizations focused on health and medicine



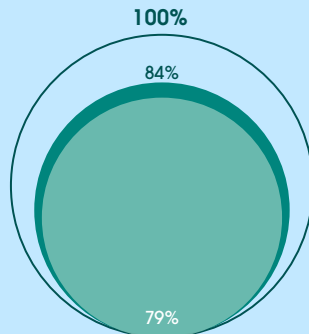
Giving to individuals or businesses at a local level (e.g., donating money directly to individuals or businesses in need in your community; purchasing food or supplies for local healthcare workers)



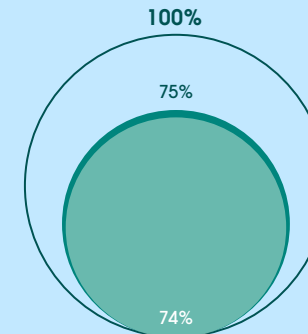
Giving to individuals or businesses at a non-local level (e.g., donating money directly to individuals or businesses in need outside of your community; contributing to GoFundMe campaigns)



Giving to charitable organizations for other purposes not listed above (e.g., for educational purposes, for the arts, for environmental causes)



Giving to charitable organizations for religious purposes or spiritual development (e.g., churches, synagogues, mosques, or TV/radio ministries)



Volunteering

Data Source: Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy



Individual Philanthropy in 2020

Finding 2

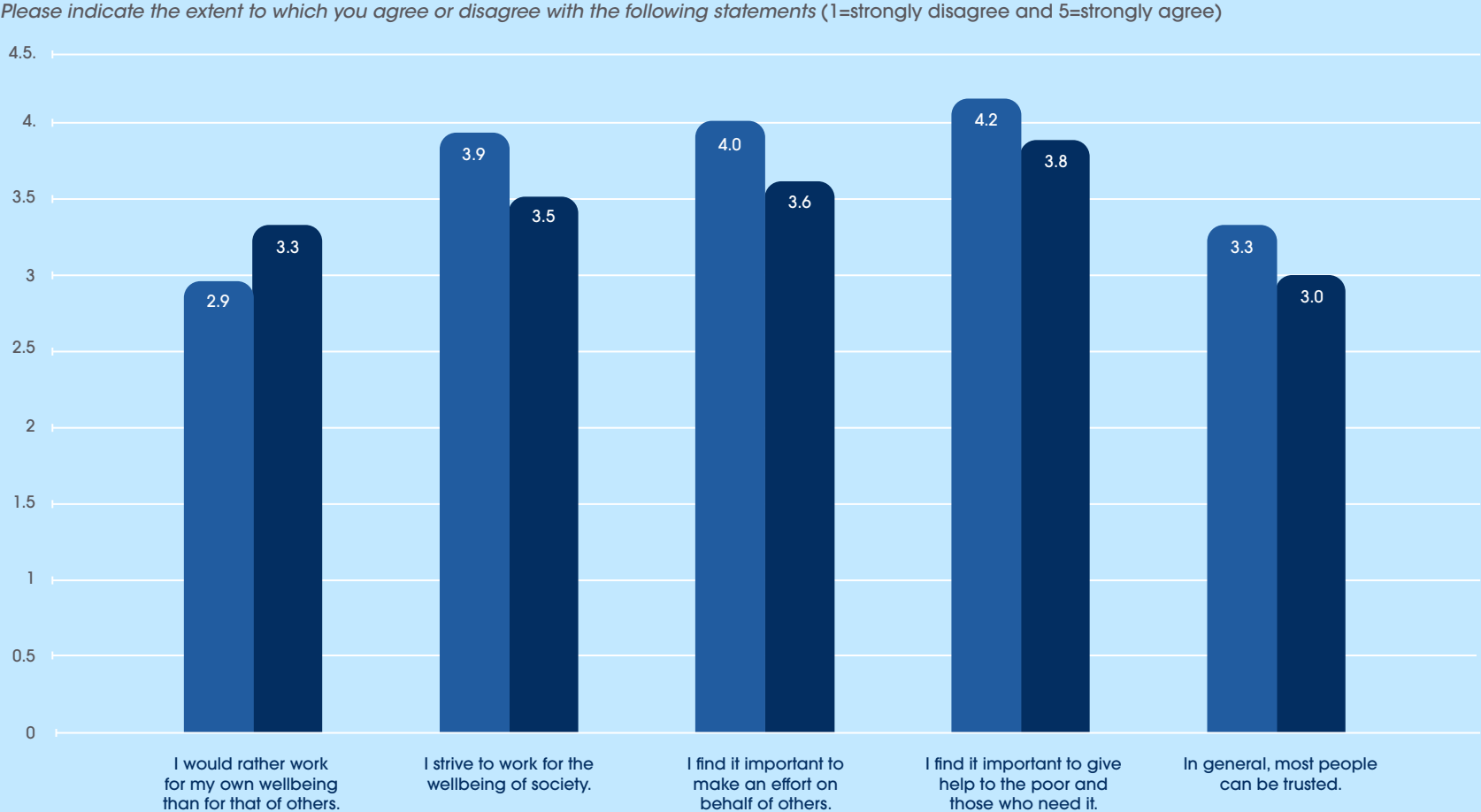
Donors who gave to COVID-related causes more often indicated that other people can be trusted and were more motivated to strive for the wellbeing of others and society.

- Based on data from the September survey only, individuals indicated their level of agreement to a statement. These statements were compared between giving to non-COVID-related causes and giving to COVID-related causes in order to determine the significance of COVID as a factor in giving.
- During at least certain moments of the pandemic, individuals who gave to COVID-related causes were more motivated to help others and improve the wellbeing of society than donors who gave to non-COVID-related causes. Donors who gave to COVID-related causes were also more likely to trust others.
- Although these findings are not broadly applicable, they do provide important reflections about possible associations between COVID-related giving and trust and helping behaviors.

Figure 2. Motivations for Giving to COVID-Related and Non-COVID-Related Causes

Motivations for Individual Giving

- Donors to COVID-Related Causes
- Donors to Non-COVID-Related Causes



Data Source: Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy

Individual Philanthropy in 2020

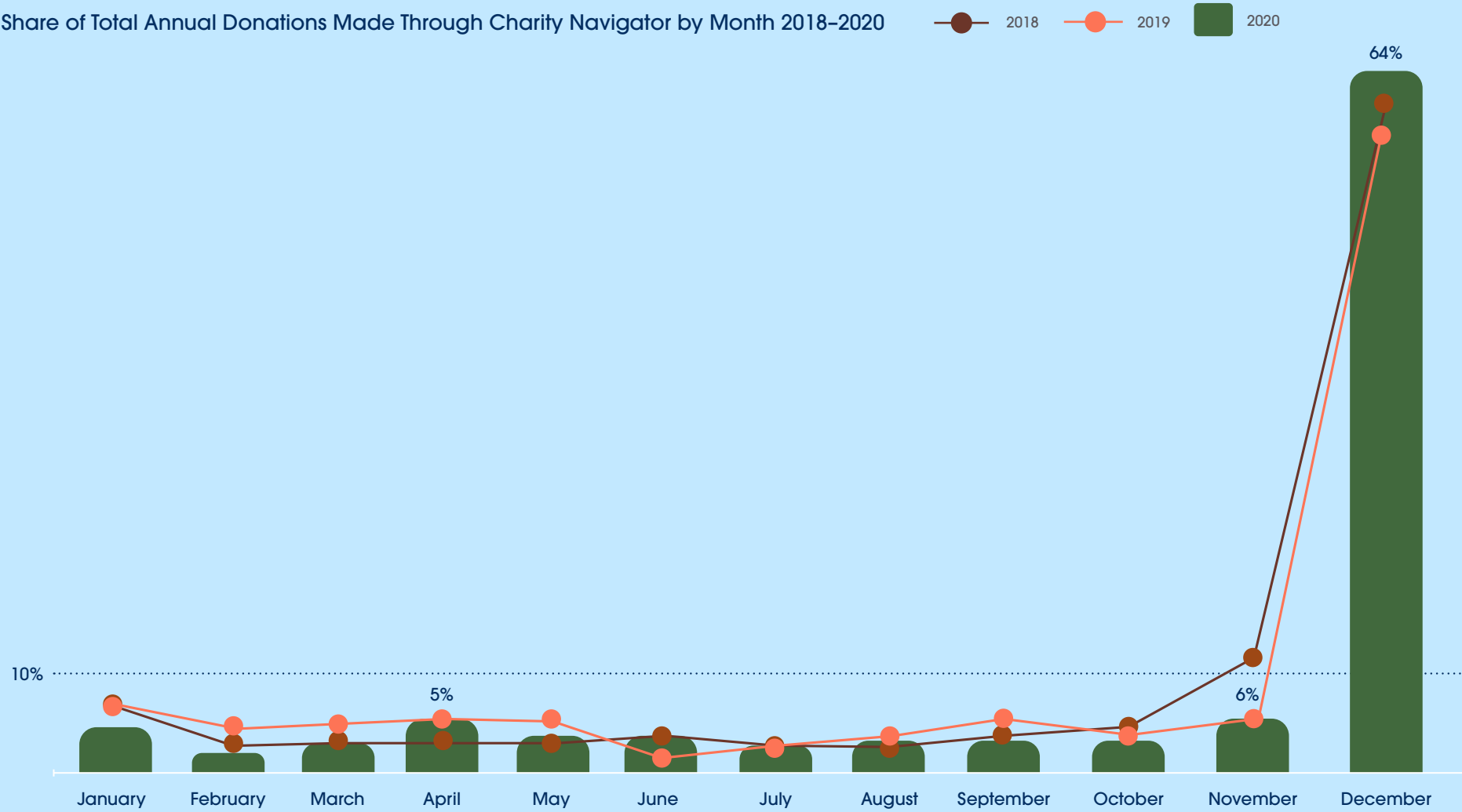
Finding 3

End-of-year giving made up a larger portion of giving in 2020 than in the previous two years.

- According to data from Charity Navigator, 64% of annual giving occurred in December 2020, compared with 58% and 56% in 2018 and 2019, respectively.
- April 2020, the first full month after the nation went under lockdown, accounted for 5% of total giving in 2020. This was a higher share of annual giving than the previous two Aprils. In fact, April accounted for the third-highest amount given through Charity Navigator in 2020, trailing December (64%) and November (6%).
- The Charity Navigator trends are not generalizable. Some individual organizations may have experienced different trends. For example, data from the CDC Foundation, which ran a very successful crowdfunding campaign during the pandemic, was more weighted toward the early months of the pandemic. Around 65% of giving from March through November took place in April.



Figure 3. Share of Total Annual Donations Made Through Charity Navigator by Month 2018-2020



Data Source: Charity Navigator

Individual Philanthropy in 2020

Finding 4

Subsectors directly related to responding to the pandemic, such as human services, health, and public-society benefit, saw significant increases in donations.

- Giving to human services significantly increased as a percentage of all giving during the pandemic compared with the prior year. *Giving USA 2021* reported that the share of all giving in 2020 that went to human services organizations rose from 13% to 14%. Donation-level data from Charity Navigator portrayed a more dramatic shift in online giving. In 2018 and 2019, giving to human services was at 23% and 24% of total giving, respectively. In 2020, giving to human services jumped to 31% of all giving.
- During 2020, the average individual gift amounts to human services and health initiatives were \$126 (27% increase from 2019) and \$138 (8% increase from 2019), respectively.
- Online giving to human services seems to have predominantly come at the expense of environmental (17% to 13%) and international (26% to 23%) organizations.
- Giving to public-society benefit organizations, including advocacy groups and United Way, increased from 10% to 12%.
- The average gift to human services was higher than in previous years, rising to \$126, up from \$99 in 2019 within the same timeframe. However, the average individual gift amount to human services still lagged behind the average gift size to other subsectors.





Individual Philanthropy in 2020

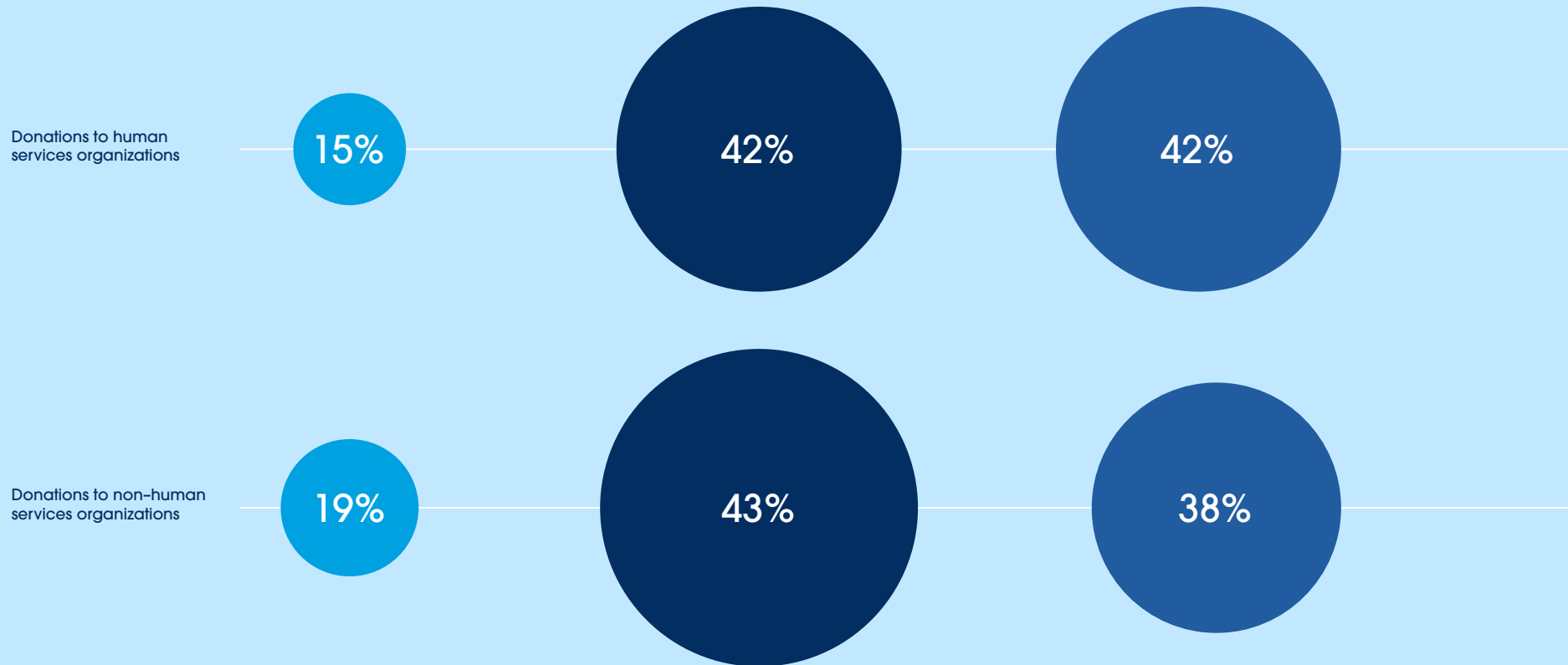
Finding 5

The profile of donors to COVID-related causes appears similar to general patterns in giving to charitable causes more broadly.

- Individuals who donated to COVID-related causes were more likely to be older, have higher household incomes, and have higher levels of education.
- Of gifts made through Charity Navigator in 2020, the biggest difference between giving to human services organizations and non-human services organizations came from those aged 65+ and those under the age of 45. Younger donors gave more to non-human services organizations, and older donors gave more to human services organizations. Those aged 45 to 64 gave roughly the same share of their donations to both types of organizations. (See Figure 4.)
- As with overall giving, women tended to donate more often than men to COVID-related causes, but women had smaller average donations than men.
 - Based on online giving data from Charity Navigator, more than half (55%) of human services gifts during the pandemic were from women, which is in line with overall giving trends.
 - This trend was similar to patterns for gifts given to the CDC Foundation during a comparable timespan, with 56% of donations coming from women.
 - While female donors made a greater total number of gifts in both datasets, female donors gifted a slim majority (51%) of the total dollar amount in Charity Navigator and a minority (45%) in the CDC Foundation data.

Figure 4. Share of Donations Made Through Charity Navigator to Human Services and Non-Human Services Organizations by Age, 2020

 <45  45-64  65+



Note: Data include only donors with available age information.
Data Source: Charity Navigator

Individual Philanthropy in 2020

Finding 6

Innovation and digital adaptation were vital to meeting new demands during COVID-19.

Interviews with the Global Impact and CDC Foundation revealed the use of creativity, untested fundraising methods, and digital spaces among nonprofits and individuals as means to addressing the pandemic. Some interview highlights are presented below.

Global Impact

During the pandemic, Global Impact⁶ witnessed a shift in how and where to reach workplace donors. Before the pandemic, in-person and physical office locations were essential to building relationships. During the pandemic, Global Impact pivoted to provide online resources about workplace giving and events. Virtual meetings from home replaced in-person office meetings.

Matching gifts and local giving were important during 2020. Microsoft remained one of the largest employee giving programs with sizable matching gifts. In a remarkable act of generosity, the World Bank made a significant contribution in response to COVID-19 and increased its match to 200%. Overall, giving opportunities seem to have shifted away from international causes in favor of domestic causes.

⁶ The school conducted phone interviews and solicited open-ended written responses with representatives from Global Impact during the summer of 2021.



“We have been seeing a strong interest in domestic causes.”

**Global Impact Representative,
August 6, 2021**



“What has stood out most is the diverse and creative ways CDC Foundation donors and partners engaged in the mission.”

**CDC Foundation Representative,
July 30, 2021**

CDC Foundation

In March 2020, the CDC Foundation ⁷ established a crowdfunding campaign to accelerate support for the Emergency Response Fund, which the Foundation activated in January 2020. The CDC Foundation was overwhelmed with an outpouring of individual and corporate generosity.

Before COVID-19, large public and private partnerships with foundations, organizations, and corporations accounted for 99% of the CDC Foundation’s funding. In 2020, this model shifted to include individuals. Its donor base, including individuals, foundations, and corporations, grew by 245%, and total contributions grew by 184%, with gifts ranging from \$1 to \$15 million.

Platform expansion was necessary to reach and engage new audiences to support the COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund. The CDC Foundation tried new crowdfunding and online giving platforms and social media sites such as Facebook, YouTube, and Tiltify. It also used gaming, workplace team giving, online events, and cause marketing. On Facebook, for example, the CDC Foundation launched a crowdfunding campaign, which also used the All of Us campaign theme. **The campaign was supported by workplace giving at many large corporations, including Salesforce, Everbridge, Johnson & Johnson, Merck,**

and Morgan Stanley. Many of these companies linked private microsites directly to the campaign or incentivized giving with corporate matches. Large corporations and smaller companies developed team pages. And some small businesses added virtual 5Ks or online events. Facebook donated the largest corporate matching gift of \$10 million – a 2:1 matching challenge for the All of Us campaign. Out of a total of 257,484 donations to the CDC Foundation, almost 90% (232,270) gave through Facebook.

Individuals and companies also initiated fundraisers to support the CDC Foundation. TikTok created the Heroes Relief Fund and generously gave a corporate donation of \$15 million to the CDC Foundation's COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund. Prominent gamer Jack “CouRage” Dunlop hosted a live stream on his birthday in memory of his grandmother, who passed away from coronavirus. Assisted by his fans, he raised upwards of \$500,000 in support of the CDC Foundation. Eight-year-old Atlanta native Alani Thomas spent spring break creating 55 pieces of original artwork for her fundraiser in support of the CDC Foundation. She surpassed her \$800 goal with a dollar-for-dollar match from Lysol, raising a total of \$7,350.

⁷ The school conducted phone interviews and solicited open-ended written responses with representatives from the CDC Foundation during the Summer of 2021.

Discussion

The surveys and platform data are important for understanding how individuals gave during the pandemic. We found continued generosity, with giving patterns comparable to regular times. We also found a strong responsiveness to subsectors directly responding to the pandemic. Ultimately, innovation and digital function remained important throughout the pandemic.

April, the month after the pandemic was declared, and December both saw higher rates of giving than the previous two years. This trend followed an intuitive pattern of giving. When the pandemic began, people responded to it with increased giving, much like the giving patterns during a natural disaster. As the pandemic continued alongside economic and health uncertainty, giving declined. However, when anxiety over health and economic shocks were reduced by year's end, giving recovered with an unusually large amount given in December.

We also found that at least during certain moments of the pandemic, donors who gave to COVID-19-related causes had more trust in others and a greater desire to help others. These preliminary findings build on existing social identity research (Drury et al., 2020) and indicate that the pandemic

has encouraged helping behaviors. These findings related to COVID-19 donors, along with trust and helping behaviors, can be further explored to determine patterns, peaks, or ongoing shifts.

Innovation and digital spaces were important amid lockdowns and social distancing provisions, which reduced face-to-face interaction. Individuals and nonprofits found creative ways to stay connected, despite physical separation. For example, the CDC Foundation embraced change and incorporated crowdfunding. It launched campaigns on untested platforms, including Charidy, TikTok, Benevity, YourCause, and ActBlue. By continuing to solicit donations in places where donors were highly present during the pandemic – the digital space – the CDC Foundation experienced a 184% growth in contributions. This example highlights the growing importance of a digital presence moving forward.

Ultimately, maintained generosity, ingenuity, and online capabilities were notable throughout the first year of the pandemic and will remain essential in the months and years to come.

Part 2

Corporate Philanthropy in 2020





Methodology

To address the second question about corporate giving, the school utilized existing and public research, including grant data from Candid. The school further engaged in qualitative analysis through three interviews with Salesforce customers to better understand workplace giving and corporate giving during the pandemic.

Corporate Philanthropy in 2020

Finding 1

Corporations responded to the increased health demands imposed by COVID-19 with increased giving and multi-year pledges.

- According to data from Candid, \$6.2 billion in giving from U.S. companies to nonprofit organizations in 2020 was related to COVID-19 relief.⁸ Using the conservative estimate used in *Giving USA 2021*,⁹ the overall 2020 value for COVID-19 relief by U.S. corporations and corporate foundations to U.S.-based nonprofit organizations was estimated to be \$1.1 billion, excluding pledges.
- Our analysis of Candid's data indicates a noticeable gap between pledges and overall corporate giving amounts. This gap appears primarily for two reasons: 1) the way in which some grants were announced unclearly but not later released; and 2) the complex form of some corporate giving programs.

⁸ Candid. (2021). Philanthropy's response to coronavirus (COVID-19). Retrieved August 26, 2021, <https://candid.org/explore-issues/coronavirus>.

⁹ Giving USA counted only gifts from U.S. funders and to U.S.-based nonprofit organizations. Additionally, gifts that have unknown recipients and pledged donations were excluded from the analysis here. Grants paid out to another grantmaking organization (such as a gift made by a company to its own foundation, which in turn granted to support COVID-19 relief) were excluded as well in order to avoid double counting.

Corporate Philanthropy in 2020

Finding 2

The commitment of corporate philanthropy to health causes stands in contrast to other types of donors.

- At 35.3% of all giving, health causes received the largest share of corporate gifts made to support COVID-19 relief efforts in the U.S., as shown in data from Candid.
- Compared with other types of donors, U.S. corporations gave less of their COVID-19 relief dollars to education and human services and considerably more to health and international causes.
- When examining subsector data, there is a noticeable contrast between the types of gifts made by corporations and non-corporations. Human services received over three times as many gifts as health causes in non-corporate gifts (40% and 12% of total donations from non-corporate donors, respectively).

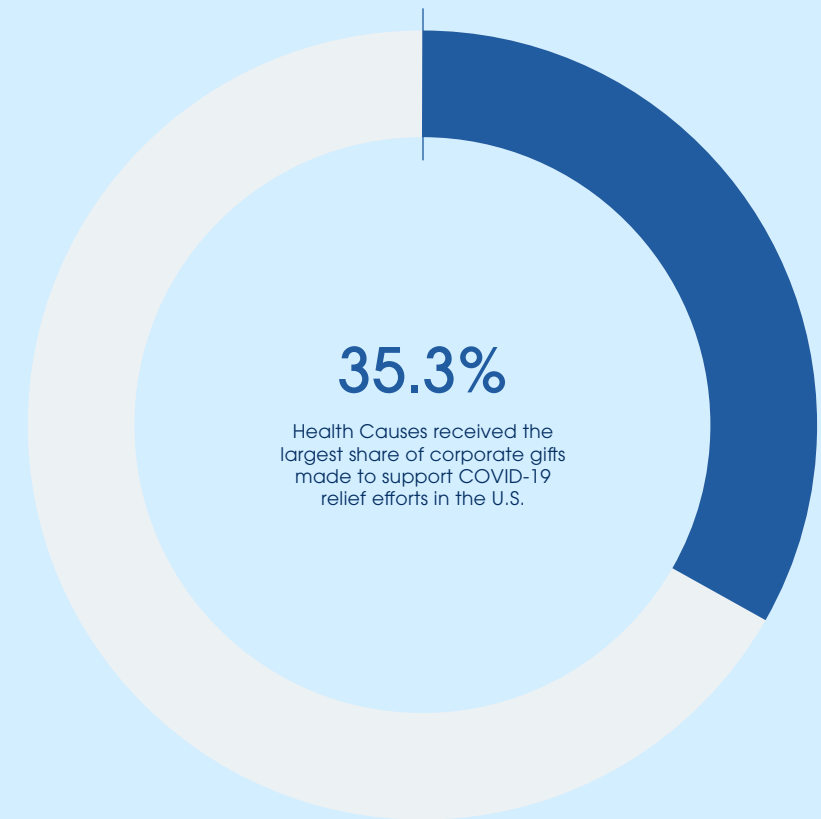
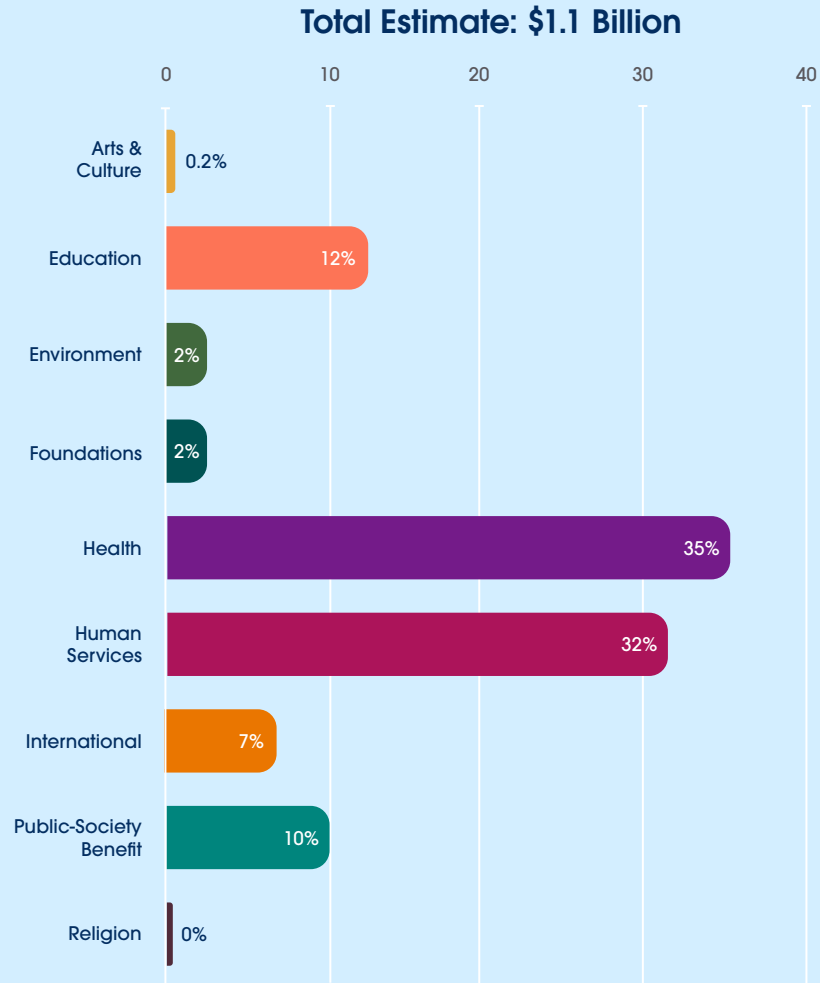
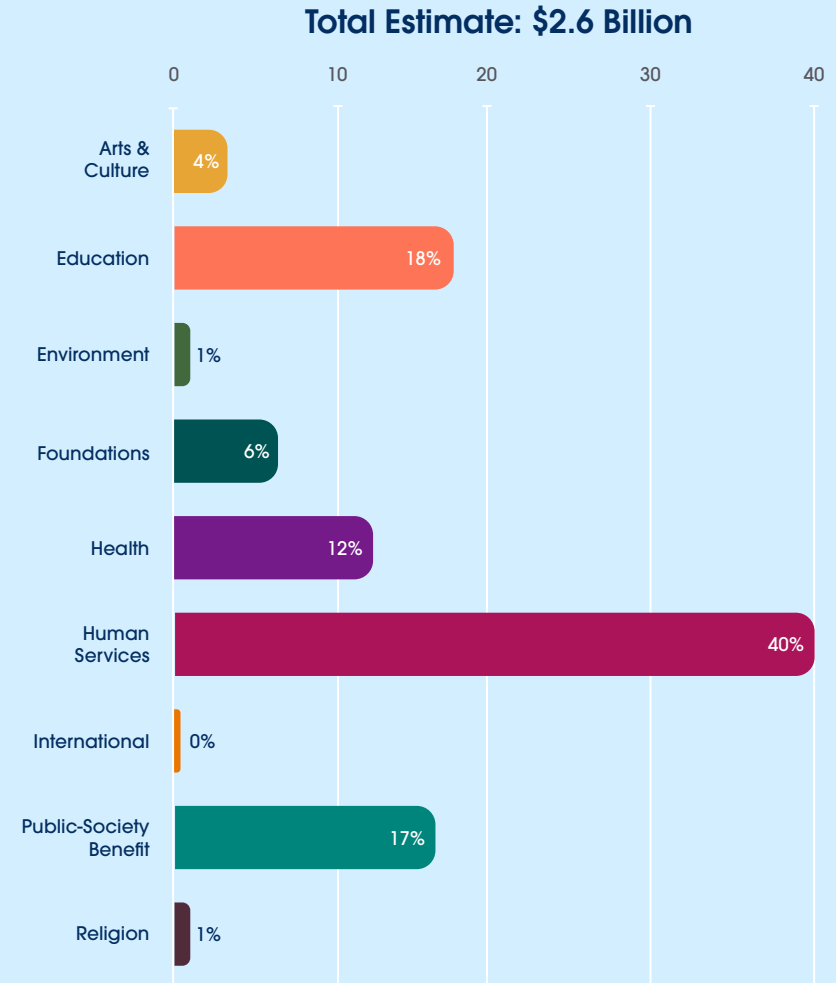


Figure 5. Donations from U.S. Corporations to U.S.-Based Nonprofits in Support of COVID-19 Relief Efforts by Subsector, 2020



Data Source: Candid

Figure 6. Donations from U.S. Non-Corporate Donors to U.S.-Based Nonprofits in Support of COVID-19 Relief Efforts by Subsector, 2020



Data Source: Candid

Note: The \$4.2 billion in donations from MacKenzie Scott was not included in this graph. That giving went largely to human services and education organizations.

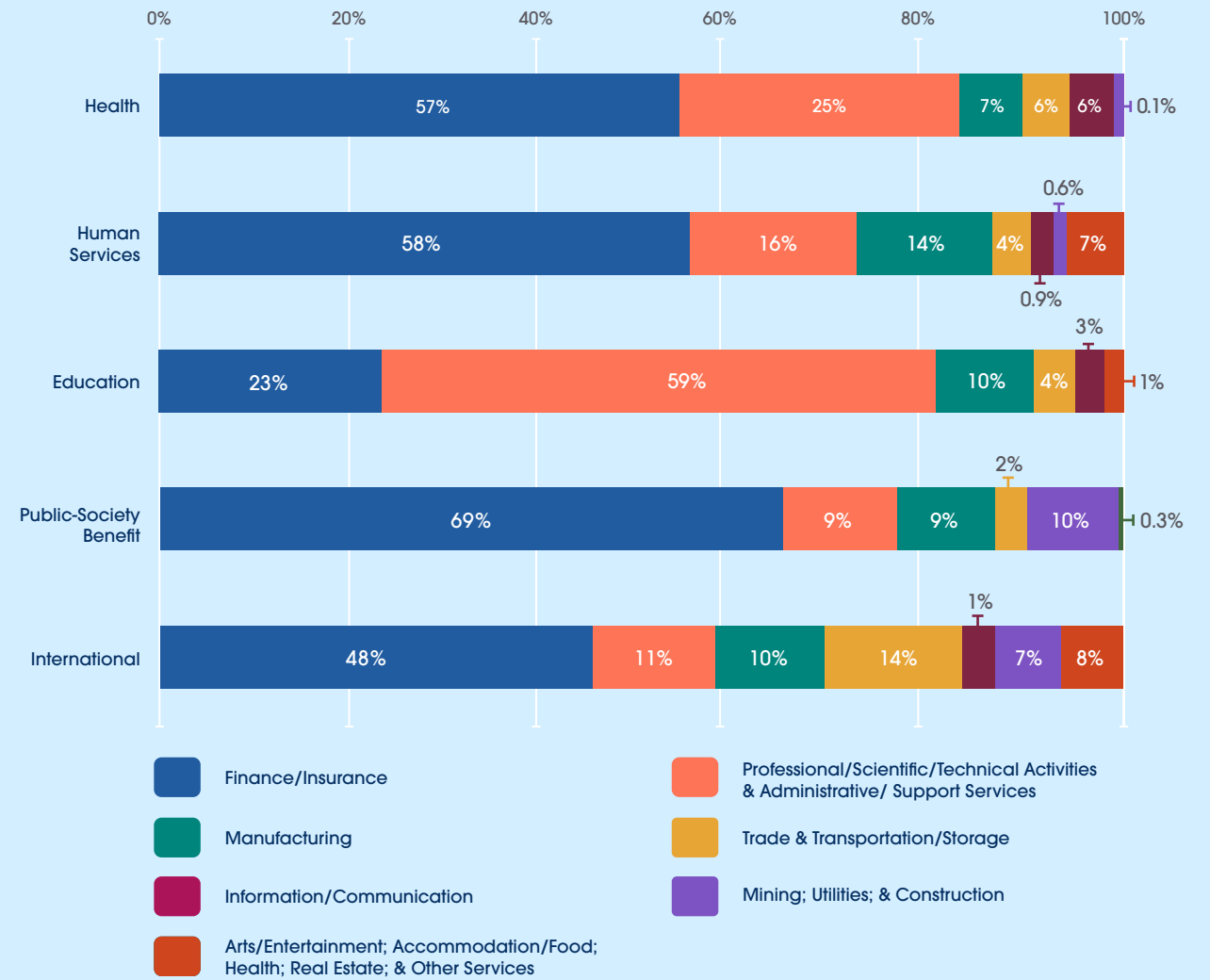
Corporate Philanthropy in 2020

Finding 3

Finance and insurance companies dominated U.S. corporate giving to COVID-19 relief in 2020.

- Nearly three-fifths (58%) of the charitable dollars that U.S. corporations donated to support COVID-19 relief efforts by U.S.-based nonprofits in 2020 came from companies in the financial and insurance activities industry. Companies in two industries – professional, scientific, and technical activities; and administrative and support service activities – contributed over a quarter (27%) of the total charitable dollars. The remaining 15% of charitable giving was donated by companies in another 12 industries, including trade, transportation, and storage; information and communication; and arts and entertainment.
- Among the top five subsectors that received the most corporate philanthropic support, health, human services, and public-society benefit each received more than half of the charitable contributions from finance and insurance companies (at 57%, 58%, and 69%, respectively).
- Education received approximately 60% of corporate giving from companies in the industries of professional, scientific, and technical activities, and administrative and support service activities.
- International causes received about half (48%) of corporate philanthropy from finance and insurance companies, and 14% from companies in the trade and transportation and storage industries.

Figure 7. Corporate Donations to the Top 5 Subsectors by Industry, 2020



Data Source: Candid

Corporate Philanthropy in 2020

Finding 4

Corporations that participated in interviews with the school pivoted workplace giving programs in response to COVID-19, with a heavy reliance on technology.

Interviews were conducted with two corporations and a nonprofit organization, all of which are Salesforce customers. These interviews provided additional insights into some internal, employee-focused responses to COVID-19. Although responses varied, three common themes emerged:

1. Emphasis on matching gifts for employees
2. Expansion of volunteering opportunities for employees
3. Innovation utilizing technology

Corporations responded to COVID-19 by ensuring that resources were directed to community needs and employees had workplace opportunities to give. Not surprisingly, technology played a critical role for corporations to continue their workplace giving programs during the pandemic. In-person campaigns shifted to virtual.

Although matching programs and volunteering opportunities were expanded by employers, employees did not respond to these opportunities with the same commitment. There were some challenges in the ability to implement workplace giving campaigns, partly attributed to the various personal stresses faced by employees because of COVID-19.

Interviews with Deluxe, GuideWell, and United Way revealed the importance of technology and innovation in workplace giving programs as means to addressing the pandemic.



The logo for Deluxe, featuring the word "deluxe" in a lowercase, sans-serif font. The "deluxe" part is in black, and the "x" is in red.

Deluxe¹⁰ is a Trusted Payments and Business Technology™ company that serves a mix of for-profit and nonprofit clients. During the pandemic, Deluxe utilized existing technology via Salesforce.org Philanthropy Cloud to understand employee giving trends and to organize donation drives. Deluxe saw a shift in employee giving – away from education and toward community-based nonprofits and direct services. It also supported employee-led social justice initiatives with a \$1.2 million commitment to partner with racial equity organizations, such as the National Urban League and the National Center for Civil Rights. Deluxe further started an employee relief fund, expanded an existing food drive campaign, and expanded paid time off for employees who volunteered eight to twenty-four hours.

¹⁰ The school conducted an interview with Deluxe on July 20, 2021.

¹¹ The school conducted an interview with GuideWell on July 29, 2021.

¹² The school conducted an interview with United Way on July 21, 2021.

The logo for GuideWell, featuring the word "GUIDEWELL" in a bold, uppercase, sans-serif font. The "GUIDE" part is in black, and the "WELL" part is in teal.

GuideWell¹¹ (Florida Blue) is a Florida-based healthcare company that has long partnered with United Way for its philanthropic activities. During the pandemic, the company continued its annual employee giving campaign using existing technology via Salesforce.org Philanthropy Cloud. In March 2020, GuideWell pivoted to an all-virtual employee giving campaign and successfully built on virtual giving in 2021. Throughout the pandemic, the company increased its match of employee contributions to each employee's local United Way. It also emphasized giving to an existing employee relief fund, LIFT by GuideWell. The employee giving campaign exceeded its goals both years, raising over \$1.3M in 2020 and more than \$1.5M in 2021.

The logo for United Way, featuring the words "United Way" in a bold, uppercase, sans-serif font. The "United" part is in white on a blue background, and the "Way" part is in white on a blue background. To the right of the text is a circular icon with a yellow sun and a blue hand holding a person.

United Way¹² is a global charitable organization, helping businesses organize and promote their philanthropic activities and charitable giving. United Way saw a sizable philanthropic response during the early months, including an online telethon among corporations, nonprofits, and individuals. United Way also engaged in other initiatives, such as a partnership with DoorDash to deliver meals to families in need. During crisis mode, United Way ensured coordination among members to most effectively respond to community needs. United Way also focused on its racial equity initiatives as an organization and among leadership.

Discussion

The health and economic impacts of COVID-19 have also affected corporations, causing a decline in overall corporate giving, likely in response to lower corporate pretax profits and GDP changes.

Although corporations emphasized matching gifts and expanded volunteer opportunities, many corporations faced some disruption in workplace giving. Employees may have struggled with personal finances or other pandemic-related issues and thus had diminished ability to take advantage of these opportunities. Looking ahead, corporate giving will benefit from innovative ideas emerging from a growth in the remote workforce and a surge in digital fundraising and virtual volunteering.

The year 2020 was noteworthy for innovation and flexibility in many workplace giving programs and giving strategies for corporations. However, an important task ahead is to build capacity in measuring impact and sustainability. More than a year after the onset of COVID-19, many corporations still lack comprehensive information on their overall giving and volunteering efforts. Organizations should assess existing policies and practices that may hinder progress and thoughtfully supplement or create new systems that support meaningful impact and engagement.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic and its effects have had a profound impact on nearly all aspects of philanthropic giving. For individuals, corporations, and nonprofit institutions, the ramifications are still unfolding. Individual donors, corporations, and nonprofits have altered their giving behaviors and choices in response to the economic impacts and health implications of the pandemic. Additionally, events such as calls for racial justice in 2020 and the uncertain nature of the U.S. economy also played a role in reshaping the philanthropic landscape.

In a year of unprecedented events and difficulties, there were greater giving challenges placed on donors and nonprofit organizations. Remarkably, many donors maintained their commitments and adapted to the shifting environment – a trend witnessed in prior national crises and economic recessions. Several aspects of the charitable landscape saw discernable shifts: Giving shifted away from environmental and international

organizations to human services organizations; year-end giving was especially high; and charitable giving to friends, neighbors, local establishments, and strangers expanded. Responding to basic needs, giving to COVID-19 relief and human services, and growth in online giving all helped shape charitable responses in 2020.

Nonprofits and corporations developed creative channels and adapted to these challenges, as demonstrated by the innovative use of online platforms for health-related causes and workplace giving. We anticipate that the use of innovative technology will continue to shape the philanthropic sector.

Although the long-term effects of the pandemic are still unfolding, an examination of and reflection into the pandemic's short- and mid-term effects provide vital information to individuals, nonprofits, and corporations for planning and adaptation.

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