

# MOVING MONEY AND SHIFTING POWER FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

**VOICES OF WEALTHY NEXT-GEN DONORS**



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**IUPUI WOMEN'S PHILANTHROPY INSTITUTE**  
LILLY FAMILY SCHOOL OF PHILANTHROPY

**RESEARCH THAT GROWS WOMEN'S PHILANTHROPY**

## WRITTEN & RESEARCHED BY

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### **Women's Philanthropy Institute**

The Women's Philanthropy Institute (WPI) is part of the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. WPI increases understanding of women's philanthropy through rigorous research and education, interpreting and sharing these insights broadly to improve philanthropy. Learn more at <https://philanthropy.iupui.edu/WPI>.

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## FOREWORD



The Women's Philanthropy Institute (WPI) is proud to publish this research report, led by Dr. Elizabeth Dale of Seattle University, a longtime colleague in researching gender and philanthropy. In this most recent collaboration, Dr. Dale has crafted a story—one of how a group of young wealthy donors are giving to social justice—that has implications for all of us, and builds on research about women and philanthropy in particular. In this report you will gain insight on how this select group of donors defines this type of philanthropy, how they practice social justice giving; and the obstacles they face in doing so. Interviewees' overlapping, intersectional identities—be it gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, class privilege or religious beliefs—are key to their giving decisions.

For this study, Dr. Dale interviewed participants that few studies focus on: young, wealthy, predominantly female donors, with many identifying as queer or part of the LGBTQ+ community. Importantly, the study highlights Millennial and Gen Z donors, who have many decades of giving ahead and whose giving patterns are still emerging. While many have hypothesized about how younger generations will give compared to previous generations, the details are scarce. This study helps us understand how these young donors, especially those with more abundant financial resources, are approaching their giving. Finally, Dr. Dale's focus on giving to social justice causes and organizations is a major area of interest in the field. Racial and social justice causes

comprise a relatively small portion of all philanthropy. However, giving to these areas has grown rapidly, and racial and social justice topics have been central to many philanthropic conversations in recent years.

While this report is not explicitly about women donors, it touches on many areas of interest to WPI: giving by young, wealthy donors; giving by LGBTQ+ donors; giving to racial and social justice; intergenerational wealth and giving dynamics; reparative philanthropy, or giving to address problematic ways in which wealth was earned—and more. Additionally, we have challenged ourselves to look at gender and philanthropy in a more expansive way. At the Women's Philanthropy Institute, we seek to understand how intersectional identities influence philanthropy; gender is just one facet of the complexity of individuals' identities.

Since this report focuses on giving to social justice, it is not surprising that the donors interviewed hold left-of-center political beliefs. The Women's Philanthropy Institute is an apolitical organization and encourages giving to whatever causes resonate with donors. The research question in this report is not whether interviewees' beliefs are correct or whether WPI agrees with their beliefs; rather, it's to understand more about how these donors give and how they think about their giving.

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**JEANNIE SAGER**

*Director, Women's Philanthropy Institute*

## INTRODUCTION

Wealthy donors face a paradox of wanting to improve society, which often involves addressing systemic inequities, while having achieved their privileged class positions through unjust economic systems that have only widened wealth inequality. Mega-donor MacKenzie Scott commented on this phenomenon when describing her recent giving, much of which has been directed toward under-resourced populations: “Putting large donors at the center of stories on social progress is a distortion of their role. We are attempting to give away a fortune that was enabled by systems in need of change.”<sup>1</sup>

An earlier recognition of this paradox comes from Peter Buffett, billionaire Warren Buffett’s son, who in a *New York Times* opinion piece said that philanthropy serves as “conscience laundering” for wealthy donors that “keeps the existing structure of [economic] inequity in place.”<sup>2</sup> In the decade since this op-ed was written, a number of movements for large-scale change have gained momentum: racial justice, immigrant justice, prison justice, and gender justice, to name a few. At the same time, wealth inequality has only continued to grow.<sup>3</sup>

This inequality became even more apparent as the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020. Coupled with heightened attention to racial injustice and police brutality after George Floyd’s murder, people responded in seemingly quicker and more visible ways than for other recent crises. Mutual aid networks sprung up in communities large and small to support those impacted by the pandemic and racial injustice. Millions around the world engaged in marches and protests in support of Black lives, and an estimated \$90 million was donated to bail funds for arrested protesters.<sup>4</sup> Many corporate and foundation funders made public statements and pledges of financial support to root out injustice, fund Black-owned businesses, and elevate opportunities for people of color; but more than two years later, follow-through has been mixed.<sup>5</sup>

This report, *Moving Money and Shifting Power for Social Justice: Voices of Wealthy Next-Gen Donors*, examines how a select group of young, wealthy donors are giving to support social justice causes. The idea of social justice philanthropy may seem contradictory to some. If wealth has been made from the labor or exploitation of others, how can it be used to reform the systems that created that wealth in the first place? But the reality of people’s lived experiences is far more complicated. A fundamental human desire to help fuels half of Americans to give to nonprofit organizations; more than a quarter volunteer each year.<sup>6</sup> And research by the Women’s Philanthropy Institute (WPI) shows that women and those who are younger, Black, or identify as LGBTQ+ are more likely to support racial justice causes and organizations.<sup>7</sup>



Deploying financial resources for social justice aims is not a new phenomenon. In 1979, an earlier generation of young wealth inheritors grappled with similar questions, holding a vision of “change, not charity.”<sup>8</sup> These donors founded a cadre of social justice funds—from Haymarket People’s Fund in Boston, to the Chinook Fund in Denver, the North Star Fund in New York City, and Appalachian Community Fund in Tennessee—funding intermediaries that continue to play key roles in social justice philanthropy movements today.<sup>9</sup> National and international foundations and intermediaries like the Third Wave Fund, Groundswell Fund, and Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice later joined this funding movement, directing resources to grassroots organizations. Alongside local and regional social justice community foundations, these groups fund community organizing and prioritize funding organizations in which the people most impacted by unjust systems were the decision-makers and leaders. While some of these larger funds and organizations have been studied, little is known about the perspectives, motivations and decision-making processes of individual donors who support social justice organizations.

This study aims to better understand a new generation of social justice donors and how they think about their giving. These Millennials and Gen Z-ers tend to be more open-minded, liberal-leaning, and actively engaged in advocating for the fair and equal treatment of others compared to previous generations.<sup>10</sup> The study also focuses on the wealthiest in these generations—the top 10%—who have been active in giving from a younger age and at higher levels than the average 30-year-old today. What can we learn about social justice giving from these donors? What are they doing that other wealthy people who wish to support social justice could consider? Since these donors have many more years of giving ahead, are they a sign of philanthropy’s future? The findings, drawn from 28 extensive interviews, offer a number of lessons for donors, nonprofits, and the larger philanthropic sector.



## KEY FINDINGS

The following key findings are based on 28 interviews with Millennial and Gen Z donors, all of whom are current or past members of the donor network Resource Generation and identify as having class privilege. Study methods, participants, and limitations are described in more detail later in this report.

1. For many participants, social justice philanthropy is an attempt to reconcile the gap between the world in which wealthy donors operate today and the values they hold for a more equitable future.
2. While social justice philanthropy does not have a singular definition, donors interviewed for this study typically enact six practices with their giving:
  - (1) Cede power;
  - (2) Empower others;
  - (3) Be transparent;
  - (4) Change systems;
  - (5) Give wholly; and
  - (6) Challenge oneself.
3. For these donors, social justice philanthropy not only includes supporting traditional 501(c)(3) nonprofits, but encompasses political giving and movement building, giving to mutual aid and rapid response, and sharing resources directly with friends and community members.
4. Key obstacles that social justice donors described include:
  - (1) the complexities of wealth, such as donors' access to their assets or understanding of their wealth as their own (compared to a legacy of another relative);
  - (2) overcoming discomfort with openly discussing money and navigating family relationships;
  - (3) the surprising amount of time and effort it takes to give money away; and
  - (4) the tension of working to address social justice within a flawed and unjust system.
5. Complex and intersectional identities, including a donor's gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation and religious beliefs, drive giving to social justice causes for many donors interviewed for this study.



## BACKGROUND

Social justice philanthropy has gained visibility in response to wide-ranging events that have disproportionately impacted marginalized communities. The past several years have seen challenges to racial justice, reproductive justice, trans rights, and immigrants' rights; heightened attention on police violence; communities of color bearing the outsized impact of natural disasters brought about by climate change; and a global pandemic that especially affected people of color, women, and people with lower incomes. At the same time, a surging stock market has increased wealth inequality and minted many new millionaires and billionaires.<sup>11</sup> Younger people are inheriting unprecedented wealth from the Baby Boomer generation—\$70 trillion, by some estimates—and may use their money in different ways than prior generations.<sup>12</sup>

In response to these events, social justice funding has moved into mainstream conversations about American philanthropy. Notable headlines include the 2017 viral Facebook campaign for the Texas-based immigrant-rights organization RAICES that raised over \$20 million following the Trump administration's order to separate parents and children crossing the U.S.-Mexico border;<sup>13</sup> the millions of dollars contributed to the Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation following the death of George Floyd at the hands of police in 2020;<sup>14</sup> and the groundswell of support for reproductive rights organizations after the U.S. Supreme Court's overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in 2022.<sup>15</sup> While much of this giving was driven by everyday donors and smaller donations of \$25 or \$50, large gifts and pledges from wealthy individuals like MacKenzie Scott<sup>16</sup> and Michael Jordan<sup>17</sup> garnered significant attention, as did commitments from large, private foundations to apply a diversity, equity, and justice lens to their grantmaking. For example, the Ford Foundation sold \$1 billion in social bonds to double their support for racial justice and civil rights in 2020.<sup>18</sup> These philanthropic actions do not come without criticism, particularly from the underlying inherent contradiction of its actors, as well as the critiques of 'woke-ism' – a term often used disparagingly.<sup>19</sup>

### *Defining social justice philanthropy*

While social justice philanthropy has received increased attention in recent years, this term includes a diverse set of giving practices and does not have a single, agreed-upon definition. Largely used by grantmakers and philanthropic practitioners, the most common understanding of social justice philanthropy is giving that seeks to address the root causes of social and economic inequalities, or structural change, rather than immediate needs, like providing food, housing



or medical care.<sup>20</sup> The National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP), an organization that champions foundation giving for underserved populations, says social justice philanthropy has two tenets:

1. Funding intended to benefit underserved communities: the *population* element.
2. Funding with the explicit goal of long-term systemic change: the *strategy* element.<sup>21</sup>

Scholars and activists might also add a third tenet: funding that is *accountable* to the marginalized and disenfranchised communities it intends to benefit. Others may go even further to say that individuals in the communities should *control* the decision-making process about funding.<sup>22</sup> While social justice philanthropy might be the most prevalent term, this type of giving may also be called “social change,” “social movement,” or “community-based” philanthropy. Similarly, a range of associated practices—from participatory grantmaking to trust-based philanthropy to community-centric fundraising—share similar goals of de-centering donors and putting more trust and decision making into the hands of communities that donors want to help.

To date, social justice philanthropy has largely been discussed and researched in the context of foundations; less is known about individual donors who approach their giving with these aims. Research on giving to racial justice causes indicates that women, people of color, members of the LGBTQ+ community and younger donors might be more inclined to approach their giving with this lens.<sup>23</sup> Similar to support for racial justice causes, social justice philanthropy is not limited to giving money to formal, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations, but includes mutual aid, donating to grassroots groups, political and advocacy giving, as well as making values-aligned purchases and financial decisions.<sup>24</sup>

### ***Previous research on social justice giving***

A handful of studies have examined social justice giving as a portion of overall American philanthropy. According to the NCRP, 31% of foundation funding was intended to benefit underserved communities, with a smaller amount of that funding earmarked for long-term systems change.<sup>25</sup> A 2009 report by The Foundation Center found that only 12% of foundation dollars were directed to social justice causes, which was up from 3% before 1990.<sup>26</sup> A 2012 study found that smaller, younger, and public foundations were more likely to mention social justice or social change in their program descriptions, challenging conventional discourse and pressuring other foundations to expand their funding for these causes.<sup>27</sup>



While studies have analyzed social justice funding among foundations based on public grant data, measuring this funding from individual donors is much more difficult. Giving by individuals to specific cause areas is challenging to track and may even occur outside of registered 501(c)(3) nonprofits completely.

However, several studies on individual giving do provide relevant insights regarding social justice philanthropy. *Women Give 2022*, which looked at support for racial justice causes in 2020, found that single women, Black households, LGBTQ+ households and young people were all more likely to have supported racial justice protests and given money to racial justice causes and organizations.<sup>28</sup> Qualitative studies have also shown that LGBTQ+ and women donors are often motivated to give in justice-based ways, especially when they have experienced or witnessed discrimination themselves.<sup>29</sup> And young, wealthy donors—from Gen-X and the Millennial generations—have expressed a desire to revolutionize philanthropy, seeking greater involvement, impact, and innovation, and demonstrating a readiness to give in creative ways that blur the lines between for-profit, nonprofit, and public solutions.<sup>30</sup>

This report builds on these existing research findings by studying members and alumni of Resource Generation. Resource Generation is a donor membership organization that formed in the late 1990s to provide donor education, organizing, and a giving community for young people ages 18 to 35 with class privilege. Resource Generation’s mission is to “organize young people with wealth and class privilege in the U.S. to become transformative leaders working towards the equitable distribution of wealth, land and power.”<sup>31</sup> While anyone is welcome to join Resource Generation and the organization includes members from different socio-economic classes, they define having wealth as being in the top 10% of net wealth for young people (18-35), whether through personal income, personal net financial assets, or through access to family wealth. Members can choose to participate in a range of ways, from engaging with one of 19 local chapters to taking part in national webinars, “praxis” meetings, attending Resource Generation’s annual conferences, or reading through the breadth of resources they offer online or in print. Earlier research provided a case study on the organization, and how its donor organizing model helped young people with wealth use their resources responsibly.<sup>32</sup> The current study revisits members and alumni from Resource Generation to develop a working definition of social justice philanthropy among a group of young people who largely identify as female, non-binary, or queer, and who hold or will have access to vastly greater wealth than the average 20-, 30-, or 40-year-old.

## STUDY METHODS

To understand social justice giving by younger donors, we partnered with Resource Generation (RG) to conduct individual interviews with its members and alumni. From April through September 2022, we conducted 28 interviews with current or alumni members of Resource Generation, during which we talked about their wealth, philanthropic activities, advocacy, and personal identities. Each interview took place via video conference, enabling us to speak with Resource Generation members from across the United States. Each interview was recorded with the participant's permission and transcribed verbatim. Interviews ranged from 70 to 90 minutes in length. We then coded each interview to identify common categories and develop related themes.

Even though Resource Generation encourages its members to be open about their wealth and giving, participants in this study are anonymous to encourage candid conversations. In some cases, we have also masked the names of organizations or workplaces that might make interviewees identifiable. In these cases, a more general name was used and appears in brackets.

### *Participants*

Compared to the general population, the study participants represent a highly educated, majority-white group of young people who identified as having class privilege, which is broadly representative of Resource Generation's membership. While class privilege carries a range of definitions, one common experience participants shared was graduating college debt-free. Many participants also described other markers of wealth such as attending private K-12 schools, taking expensive family vacations, or simply “not worrying about money” as they grew up, went to college, and moved out on their own. Table 1 provides a summary of interviewees' demographic characteristics.

As seen in Table 1, women dominated the sample with 68% of participants identifying as female and 21% identifying as non-binary; there were also three men, one of whom also identified as trans. The majority (71%) of interview participants were in their 30s, while 18% were under 30 and 11% were in their early forties. Half of the sample were current members of Resource Generation while the other half were alumni. Participants had diverse sexual orientation identities, with less than half (46%) identifying as straight. Participants ranged from being single to married with children, but most were married/partnered and had no children (each 71%), showing they were in a similar life stage. All participants had attended at least some college, with 82% holding bachelor's degrees and 32% holding master's degrees.



**TABLE 1: Resource Generation study sample demographics**

<b>Demographic</b>		<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent of sample</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Female	19	68%
	Male	2	7%
	Non-binary	6	21%
	Trans man	1	4%
<b>Age</b>	Under 30	5	18%
	30-39	20	71%
	40-42	3	11%
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	Straight	13	46%
	Queer	10	36%
	Lesbian	3	11%
	Bisexual	2	7%
<b>Race<sup>33</sup></b>	White	24	86%
	Person of color	4	14%
<b>Marital status</b>	Single/Never married	8	29%
	Married/Partnered	20	71%
<b>Children</b>	None	20	71%
	1-3 children	8	29%
<b>Education (highest level completed)</b>	Some college	1	4%
	Bachelor's degree	14	50%
	Master's degree	9	32%
	Doctorate degree	4	14%
<b>Employed for pay</b>	Full-time	16	57%
	Part-time	8	29%
	Not employed	4	14%
<b>Household income</b>	Under \$100,000	10	36%
	\$100,000–\$199,999	5	18%
	\$200,000–\$499,999	10	36%
	\$500,000–\$999,999	2	7%
	\$1 million or more	1	4%
<b>Household net worth</b>	Under \$100,000	2	7%
	\$100,000–\$499,999	2	7%
	\$500,000–\$999,999	1	4%
	\$1–\$3 million	11	39%
	\$3–\$5 million	2	7%
	\$5–\$10 million	3	11%
	\$10 million or more	7	25%
<b>Time affiliated with Resource Generation</b>	2 years or less	7	25%
	3-5 years	8	29%
	6-10 years	6	21%
	More than 10 years	7	25%

Note: Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Participants had diverse employment arrangements, from working full-time or part-time (57% and 29%, respectively), to opting out of the workforce to focus on philanthropic activities or raise children (14%). Participants also had a wide range of household incomes, with the most common categories being under \$100,000 and \$200,000-499,999 (each 36%). While participants' net worth also varied, 82% had a net worth of \$1 million or more.

We compared study participants to Resource Generation's own membership survey from 2018, finding that participants were largely representative of the organization's membership overall (Table 2). The higher percentage of study participants with children, as well as participants' higher income and assets, are largely because the alumni sample included people who were older, further along in their careers, or who had greater access to inheritances.

**TABLE 2: Demographics of study sample compared to Resource Generation membership**

<b>Study sample (n=28)</b>	<b>Resource Generation membership (n=771)</b>
68% female	64% female
21% non-binary	24% non-binary
86% white	87% white
14% Asian American	12% Asian American
54% LGBTQ+	LGBTQ+ identity not asked
Median age (of current members) = 30	Median age = 29
29% have children	12% have children
64% earn over \$100,000	12% earn over \$105,000
82% have assets over \$1 million	36% have assets over \$1 million

*Note: Resource Generation member demographics obtained from a 2018 membership survey.*



## *Limitations*

Qualitative research, including this study, focuses on what we can learn from small groups of people who share a common experience or phenomenon of interest. Unlike large-scale survey research, the results are not meant to generalize to the broader population, but to explore a question or concept in much greater detail, developing a deeper understanding. Like all research, this study has limitations, most of which relate to focusing on a small group of participants:

- Since the interviewees are all younger donors with wealth privilege who have affiliated with Resource Generation, this research is not meant to be generalized. This group has unique demographic characteristics as described above. The findings and themes apply to this group but may not apply to other donors, even other young, wealthy, social-justice-minded individuals.
- This research focuses on the donor experience of giving; we did not interview nonprofit organizations or recipients of social justice funding. While the interviewees expressed an understanding of the power imbalance between donors and grantees, they still inherently hold a privileged position.
- Qualitative research acknowledges the role and perspective of the interviewer, as well the dynamic nature of conversations with interviewees. For example, some interview questions may be skipped, or follow-up questions can vary as the course of the interview progresses.
- Interviews were conducted at a particular moment in time when social justice and giving to social justice causes were key topics of conversation in the philanthropy sector and daily discourse. Depending on the future of such giving, and possible economic or policy shifts, the ways in which interviewees give and think about their giving may change.

## FINDINGS

### *What is social justice philanthropy?*

In a significant contribution to the field, this study provides a working definition of social justice philanthropy from the donor's perspective. "What is social justice philanthropy?" is a complex question. There are a common set of practices, many of which are also part of other strategies to reform and democratize philanthropy—such as trust-based philanthropy and participatory grantmaking. But in addition to a set of practices, social justice philanthropy is also a philosophical stance and values-based approach to giving, and one that extends beyond giving to 501(c)(3) nonprofits and the provision of financial support. And, as participants defined their aims and discussed their giving during the interviews, many expressed that part of their social justice giving involved an acute awareness of philanthropy's limitations.

At its core, social justice philanthropy requires understanding that giving, and especially giving from people with class privilege, is deeply intertwined with the unequal institutional systems and structures of capitalism, racism, sexism, and other "isms." In response to this understanding, social justice giving attempts to redistribute power to more people, and especially to those whose lives have been deeply harmed by these systems. In addition to being more cognizant of these unequal systems, social justice philanthropy asks donors to deeply reflect on who they are and how they interact with the world. As a result, social justice philanthropy is not simply a checklist of best practices; it stems from a mindset and a way of seeing oneself and the world. For this study's interviewees, social justice philanthropy is a framework of understanding wealth, systems, class, and privilege that informs their giving. One participant described it as:

*"It's a specific type of vision of social change, but it's one that's more leftist, one that's rooted to communities having decision-making power, one that's antiracist, anti-patriarchal, anti-capitalist, that's not hierarchical." – PARTICIPANT 19*



Participants in the study thought about and approached their wealth—and therefore their giving—with a particular worldview. In general, interviewees subscribed to a worldview based on the following premises:

- American, and Western society more broadly, is designed to serve and benefit a white, Christian, cisgender, heteronormative, male individual;
- Power and privilege are often given and reinforced by virtue of being a member of these groups; capitalist systems and social structures serve to consolidate and accumulate that power; and
- Wealth—in particular, significant inherited wealth like that of many study participants—often came from the exploitation of others' labor and resources (i.e., stolen land and enslavement) in both direct and indirect ways.

The individuals we spoke with grappled with existential questions about their identity and role in the above-described society. Many participants were prompted to think about these questions as they were exposed to a more diverse set of peers in college, in activist spaces, or at the explicit guidance of donor organizations like Resource Generation. Interviewees' views about their own identities and roles in the world can be summarized as follows:

- Wealthy individuals hold immense unearned power in society, due to their class privilege, and also by virtue of other dominant identities they hold (i.e., white, male, cisgender, etc.); and
- Participants' class privilege (i.e., having inherited wealth and/or growing up within a wealthy family) acted as insulation to experiencing possible marginalization due to also holding other traditionally non-dominant identities. At the same time, this class privilege was a challenging web to navigate, especially when they also identified as queer, non-binary, trans, and/or wanted to be allied with people who have been marginalized.

For many participants, enacting social justice philanthropy is an attempt to reconcile the gap between the world today in which wealthy donors operate and the values they hold for a more equitable future. Figure 1 outlines four goals these philanthropists identified for their giving.

However, these broad actions or intentions do not fully explain *how* these donors gave or made their giving decisions. For this study's interviewees, social justice principles were the foundation of their giving philosophy, and also informed their personal financial and lifestyle decisions. The participants we spoke with described six practices that underpinned how they interacted with organizations, and how they engaged with their wealth and with their families when making funding decisions.



**FIGURE 1:** Key goals of social justice philanthropists



### **Six social justice philanthropy practices**

While the donors we interviewed supported a wide range of social justice causes, from grassroots organizations in their local communities to Resource Generation and their national partner organizations—Movement for Black Lives and Center for Popular Democracy—they approached their giving with a common set of practices and principles. Many of these practices are ones that Resource Generation itself advocates for and encourages among its members; however, we developed this list independently of Resource Generation’s donor education materials. In essence, these six characteristics reflect how members actually carried out their giving rather than an ideal process, or how it “should be.” These practices provide guardrails and guidance to define a social justice approach to giving. While many of these ideas intersect, we identified the six core tenets of social justice giving as:

1. Cede power
2. Empower others
3. Be transparent
4. Change systems
5. Give wholly
6. Challenge oneself

Overwhelmingly, the participants we spoke with practiced each of these tactics across their giving, regardless of how ‘new’ to their wealth, their giving, or Resource Generation they were. These characteristics can be both an attribute of a giving decision as well as the goal of a gift, which is why there is overlap with Figure 1 above.



## 1. CEDE POWER: RELINQUISH DONOR CONTROL

The study participants had a strong awareness of the undue influence a wealthy person often holds in the donor-nonprofit relationship and were sensitive to it in their giving. Unlike the historical giving of many high-net-worth donors, which may be narrowly directed or even bear a named tribute to the donor with implied restrictions or conditions, participants frequently made unrestricted, general operating support gifts to nonprofit organizations. They sought to minimize their own influence on organizations' programming, services, and service recipients. In addition to relinquishing their own control, this practice served to shift power to the grantees to decide how to allocate gifts, while simultaneously limiting the donor's own influence.

Similarly, participants shared that they specifically asked that nonprofits not court them in traditional, time-intensive ways. They often declined detailed impact or grant reports, offered funding without being asked, and pushed back on personal stewardship by nonprofit staff in an effort to redirect limited nonprofit resources. One participant described their relationship with a nonprofit following a gift as follows:

*"I give to all these organizations in sort of values alignment [ways]. I don't check up on them. I'm like, 'Here you go.' I don't make them fundraise [from] me. I'm like, 'I'll give every year, you don't need to worry about me.' I also don't want to put too much burden on organizations to connect with me."* –PARTICIPANT 21

While participants wanted to relinquish their control as donors, they acknowledged one challenge of doing so was feeling disconnected from the organizations they supported. While some participants cultivated more active roles with organizations, lending their knowledge or networks, they understood that their main role was as a funder. As Participant 21 quoted above added, "I know that actually there isn't really room for rich, white people in the work."

Relationships between the donor and organization were still valued, though there was emphasis on the relationship being constructive to the work of the nonprofit (i.e., keeping an open line of communication for potential needs) and not centering the needs and interests of the donor. This could include offering personal connections, hosting an event, or fundraising on the organization's behalf.

## 2. EMPOWER OTHERS: SHIFT POWER TO MARGINALIZED INDIVIDUALS AND MAXIMIZE THEIR PARTICIPATION

Nearly all the participants we spoke with said they intentionally gave to organizations that centered marginalized individuals or communities as leaders and decision-makers; many also gave mutual aid to people who experienced multiple oppressions. Sometimes participants directed their giving to organizations specifically led by QTBIPOC (Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous, People of Color) individuals, and other times they directed it to organizations that operated in marginalized communities and where clients and beneficiaries participated in decision-making. Participant 11 described this focus on redistributing power and resources as a recognition of “what is owed from me and from other white people.” Another interviewee described his giving priorities as having “predominantly a focus on Black-led, survivor-led, and trans-led, [and] focusing on organizations where the leadership is the folks who are most impacted” (Participant 3).

Participant 5 described their mutual aid giving to individuals who experience multiple layers of identity stigma, saying:

*“[G]iving to Black trans, queer sex workers feels like it [...] takes the umbrella of queer people [who] are marginalized, Black trans people [who] are marginalized. And Black trans sex workers, it feels to me, that sort of sums up some of the people who have it hardest in the U.S., and so that's why I feel drawn to those causes.”*

Many participants also made significant gifts to intermediary organizations that embodied social justice principles such as North Star Fund and Cypress Fund. These intermediaries, which then re-grant funds to dozens of grassroots organizations, were valued because of their deep expertise in the social justice landscape, ability to build functioning coalitions, and skilled vetting of the recipients in a more substantive way than the donors felt they had the time or knowledge to do. Some participants also gave to intermediary organizations that used participatory grantmaking approaches, where marginalized individuals had active roles in setting priorities, giving feedback, and even making funding decisions to grassroots organizations.

All of these tactics served social justice donors by allowing them to rely on the expertise of people who are deeply enmeshed in values-aligned, on-the-ground work and who share common goals. Referring back to the idea of ceding control, these tactics also democratize or redistribute not just money, but more importantly, power.



*“[M]y philosophy [...] is that when I show up as a philanthropist, it's always, for me, about being hyper-aware of the power dynamics of a relationship and how to cede as much power to the individuals in the nonprofit that I want to support, and how to center their voice and their needs, and see myself, as sort of a servant leader type. [...] It is at the core of how I show up as a philanthropist.”* –PARTICIPANT 17

### **3. BE TRANSPARENT: DEMONSTRATE CONSISTENT SUPPORT**

A third tenet participants demonstrated was transparent and, when possible, consistent giving to organizations. Many participants described themselves as being a ‘reliable donor’ and cited multi-year commitments or monthly gifts as ways they provided dependable support with minimal stewardship. Similarly, participants felt that being transparent with grantees was crucial, and tried to communicate if a gift was one-time-only support, or if they were planning to shift their philanthropic commitments elsewhere in the future.

This giving practice was notably important to interviewees, many of whom have wealth tied up in complex family vehicles, such as trusts with a number of triggering events. They described this transparency as “accountability to oneself and the organizations” they supported. Regular, consistent funding was meaningful to those with inherited wealth or those whose wealth is tied up with other family members, such as parents or siblings, where control and access were factors. Giving consistently to a nonprofit in itself was a way to detach from the limitations and isolation created by structures designed to preserve wealth. Participant 28 described it as “accountability for me, because I also could have decided not to do anything with that money.”

Another participant described being transparent, not only with respect to their giving, but as a person with wealth who wanted the organization to know they were open to receiving future requests and would give again.

*“I think of it like they know who I am. [T]hey know that I'm a person with class privilege, they know that I'm part of RG and that I am not just submitting a donation online. I don't need a lot of their time, but I want to know that there's a level of trust between us, and that they know that they can come to me with an ask and that I'll say yes, obviously through a conversation. I can't always say yes, but [...] being 'in relationship' with people feels really important to me.”* –PARTICIPANT 16

By giving consistently and being open about their wealth and class privilege, participants sought to establish mutual relationships with the people and organizations they chose to support.

#### 4. CHANGE SYSTEMS: FUND LONG-TERM, SYSTEMIC CHANGE TO ADDRESS ROOT CAUSES

A key element of how participants enacted social justice giving was by making gifts explicitly for dismantling systems of oppression, rather than providing direct services to people in need. Donors approached this practice in different ways. Some donors gave to the prison abolition movement; some invested beyond the traditional market,<sup>i</sup> and others gave beyond the system of 501(c)(3) nonprofits to support mutual aid efforts and individual community members directly. While a significant number of participants reserved a portion of their giving to fund mutual aid requests, perhaps influenced by the pandemic, a tenet of social justice giving was to fund beyond direct services and instead focus their giving on long-term, transformative systems change efforts.

Participant 19 described their multi-faceted approach to long-term structural change:

*“The way that I would differentiate social justice giving, is less in sort of the type of giving, whether it’s political or whether it’s mutual aid or whether it’s capacity building, all of these different sorts of directions that it could go to, or the type, whether it’s [to a 501](c)(4) or whatever. But more the defining feature that I would use [...] is more like the values and intention around what it’s trying to achieve and what its theory of change is around systemic change and addressing the roots of the problem. You can [give] to reproductive rights organizations, and if one org[anization] is looking at it from a systemic perspective and the other one isn’t, then I would say one is more social justice giving and the other one is less so. It’s just sort of that spectrum of the values and intentions and theory towards change and how rooted it is in systemic change.”*

While we saw evidence of systems change in all kinds of participants' giving, one participant was critical of the practice of rapid response direct giving, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic started, stating:

*“I am a little bit wary of this trend toward giving via Venmo to individuals and not complementing that with something collective or something connected to shifting our economic system. [T]o me it would be a real shame if RG-ers just redistributed to individuals for the sake of assuaging guilt or just giving directly to other people. I think there needs to be moving of resources that’s more connected to trying to dismantle systems that [cause] harm.”* – PARTICIPANT 21

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<sup>i</sup>More on this subject below in *Giving beyond traditional 501(c)(3) nonprofits*.



## 5. GIVE WHOLLY: CONTRIBUTE TIME, SKILLS, EXPERTISE AND MONEY

Many study participants viewed giving money as just one aspect of their generosity and sought out numerous ways to use their resources, time, and connections to create a more equitable world. For our interviewees, “giving wholly” included being generous with non-cash assets like homes or properties, fundraising among their families and peer networks, and sharing their expertise.

Of the more tangible assets people contributed, several participants talked about opening their home or other family property, such as a vacation house, to support social justice movements. Participants offered houses as meeting spaces for activists, gathering spaces to fundraise from peers, or as retreat spaces for nonprofit staff. Participant 10 described using their home as “a show of radical hospitality, because you're welcoming people into your home and sharing your home with others.” She said, “I think there's something especially vulnerable and meaningful about that.”

Participants also aspired to give in a relational way, with open dialogue between the donor and the recipient. Interviewees sought to create relationships with nonprofits that empowered the organization to ask the donor for any type of need, not just financial, including making introductions and other connections. Participants often endeavored to fundraise on behalf of the organizations they supported, describing themselves as ‘donor organizers.’ This was notable for this group of primarily inheritors; many recognized that while they were wealthy, their family members or peers in their privileged social network often had access to multiple times more wealth. Some participants described their role in fundraising from their parents, whose assets were far greater than theirs:

*“It's more than I'm just a donor, unless they want me to just be a donor. Like the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL), they want me to just be a donor, but then for [the 501(c)(4) arm of] M4BL, I'm also a donor organizer. I've gotten my family to give better gifts. I've gotten my mom and dad individually to give their own gifts to match mine.” –PARTICIPANT 4*

*“I know that indigenous sovereignty is something that moves my dad, that he cares about. And I don't think he has developed his politics around that issue, but I know that when you talk about the way the U.S. government has treated Native Americans, he gets really upset. So, I was brainstorming with [an indigenous nonprofit] [...] because he has more money than I do. [...] And so, they shared some resources, and [...] I'm going to try to connect him to a tribal leader in an area where my dad is trying to do some conservation work and be like, maybe white people shouldn't lead that work.”* –PARTICIPANT 7

Participants described numerous other ways they gave to further the work of organizations they supported. Some offered skills such as grant writing or project management, especially if they had relevant work experience. Others intentionally opted to work for organizations in the nonprofit sector where they knowingly accepted a lower-paying position, because they could financially afford to do so. Many described divesting from the stock market and instead moving their assets to the solidarity market or community investment funds, pursuing low- or no-return investments (or even investments where the principle is not returned) in traditionally underfunded communities. Participant 28 emphasized this approach as better utilizing their assets with a justice lens, and also fulfilling their desire to not make money from inherited wealth, saying: “I don't want to be enriched [from these assets] and because, ultimately, I think what I've kind of incorporated into my own understanding is that none of this money is mine to begin with.” It became apparent through our interviews that these participants gave in many ways and looked at their assets with a holistic perspective, making a number of decisions to live a more values-aligned life that included deprioritizing the goal of obtaining more wealth.





## 6. CHALLENGE ONESELF: LEARN MORE, MOVE MONEY, GIVE BOLDLY

Lastly, this group of donors described an ongoing desire to learn and stretch themselves when discussing their giving, their political actions, their interpersonal choices, and their future giving. For some, the idea of challenging oneself was part of the snowball effect of learning about systems of inequality and beginning to act with that knowledge in mind. For example, once an individual learned about the harmful effects of a system, like money bail, they were more likely to deepen their understanding about the overall carceral system and might subsequently support efforts to abolish prisons.

The idea of challenging oneself was also tied to participants' desire to better understand their own wealth and access to wealth, whether it was because they held a longtime vague idea of 'we're wealthy-ish' that they wanted to untangle, or because they had received an unexpected inheritance or influx of cash seemingly out of thin air. As they learned more about their wealth, interviewees often also learned about how that wealth was created. Because participants already held a worldview critical of wealth accumulation, these family stories took on more complexity, and interviewees felt the responsibility of owning that wealth more personally. For example, knowledge about the origins of their wealth pushed some participants to pursue reparations-focused giving, both to Indigenous communities and Black people.

Resource Generation's programs also challenged participants to give boldly and with immediacy. They tasked members to "use real numbers" instead of euphemisms to describe their wealth, and to use specific percentages in planning their giving, often challenging and supporting one another to increase those amounts through gatherings like check-writing parties or in reviewing giving plans. Participant 20 described this view: "I do think there's a real ethos in RG to give it quickly and give it now. It's like, give it now, give big."

Participant 20 also acknowledged limitations with the pressure to keep giving more, describing a 'race to the bottom' mindset in terms of doing away with one's wealth, and saying that the goal to redistribute all their inherited assets is "just not my story." This discomfort was echoed by a few other participants, particularly for interviewees of color:

*"[RG's philosophies of] give it all away, give more, give, give, give, give, give was also something that many of the folks of color were really uncomfortable with. For a lot of those folks, their parents' generation [...] was much closer to the earning of the money; it was less multi-generational inheritance. Almost no folks [of color] have multi-generational inheritance, to be honest. And so there was a much different way that we saw the money." –PARTICIPANT 22*



While not all participants gave with the goal to completely redistribute their wealth, many saw their inherited assets as not ‘theirs.’ These participants were more likely to have given all of their inheritance away—or to have plans to do so in the future.

*“I feel like it's all this money that was just given to me, and so maybe I guess it affects my giving in that I don't feel like I have any ownership over it. I don't feel strongly attached to it, like it's mine in any way. I don't know if stewardship is the right word to use, but maybe that's the closest thing. Like, I happen to have it, and so I don't feel like I morally have much more claim to it than anybody else.” – PARTICIPANT 15*

Other participants discussed giving from both their inheritance and their earned income; one described how they learned to stretch themselves and use their feelings of discomfort as their measure of ‘how much to give’:

*“[My money coach has] a really great somatic practice. I'm still using it to this day. [...] She would just say numbers and keep raising the number until I would have an actual physical experience of discomfort. And then we would be able to find some levels that way. Because part of this is also being really honest with yourself. Because it's easy to be like, oh, most people give \$25 a month or something. But it's like how do we really decide what's appropriate for us? And it can be surprising to realize how low your limit is, or maybe even how high, or just like where it is at all. [...] One of the things I've [also] done in the past is said, I'll just double whatever my first instinct is. That can be a strategy too.” – PARTICIPANT 28*

Other participants described challenging themselves in broader ways than just giving a higher amount than they were initially comfortable with. In explaining how they give directly to mutual aid requests, one participant described an interest in figuring out how to make this type of giving more reliable and less burdensome for the recipient:

*“I want to explore—can I commit to a monthly payment for you, even if it's just \$25 a month? [...] [L]ike no questions asked and no litmus test, no give me information about yourself, but just trusting that if you need this money, you need this money; and if you don't need this money, then just here's the money [...] do something with it. I want to explore what it looks like just to give money.” – PARTICIPANT 24*



## ***Giving beyond traditional 501(c)(3) nonprofits***

Study participants held diverse perspectives on what social justice giving was and was not, and no two interviewees gave in the same ways and to the same people and organizations. However, what this group of interviewees had in common was a willingness to give beyond traditional 501(c)(3) charitable organizations—the only type of organizations for which charitable giving is incentivized by a tax deduction—when it made more sense to carry out the above practices through a different vehicle or when they wanted to give directly to an individual. For some, this was simply because the organization they felt best achieved their goals was an LLC or 501(c)(4), for example. Participants said:

*“I don't care so much about whether it's a nonprofit or for-profit, but I want organizations to have a strong social justice lens.”* –PARTICIPANT 8

*“Some of the people from RG aren't necessarily looking for a tax incentive. We're more flexible. We're like, [...] let's experiment and see if a more flexible funding mechanism like an LLC, whether there's something that it can do that other 501(c)(3)s aren't able to do right now.”* –PARTICIPANT 19

For others, giving outside the universe of 501(c)(3) organizations was an intentional choice, one that served the larger social justice goal of funding programs or people that have been historically under-funded. Traditional tax-incentivized charitable giving often excludes grassroots advocacy efforts, personal and community-based loans, and startup organizations. Some interviewees saw it as their responsibility to give to organizations or even individuals that hadn't or couldn't receive a 501(c)(3) designation because they could afford to give without the tax incentive and wanted to direct their resources to underfunded spaces. This intent was coupled with a perspective that giving in a non-tax-incentivized way allowed them to indirectly pay more of their “fair share of tax” for the wealth they held. Participant 28 described it as “paying a community tax.”

The significant wealth of this group and their commitment to a social justice vision afforded participants a level of flexibility and risk-taking in their giving and a willingness to experiment with different funding vehicles, giving opportunities, and organizations. Giving didn't start and end with registered charitable nonprofit organizations; for many interviewees, that giving was only the beginning of a much broader commitment to support people, ideas, and communities in creative and thoughtful ways.

## POLITICAL GIVING AND MOVEMENT BUILDING

Because a key aspect of social justice giving is dismantling oppressive systems, many participants described funding social movements and political advocacy as part of their giving. Many did so by giving to Resource Generation's partner organizations, Movement for Black Lives and Center for Popular Democracy. They placed their trust in these organizations to recenter marginalized communities, address the root causes of inequity, and build community. They also relied heavily on trusted 501(c)(4) organizations to guide their political giving. As Participant 1 described: "I'm not looking to know enough to have my own strategy. It's not where I want to spend my time."

While some participants gave directly to political candidates, this was not widespread. When participants did support candidates or campaigns, it was largely at the local and state level. For some, this was simply because campaign contribution limits restricted their giving. Others felt uncomfortable with the idea of giving to a single candidate, expressing a recognition that no one single person would 'save' or 'fix' society. Instead, participants had greater interest in the strength, power shifting and building, and accountability that movements provide. In Participant 13's words:

*"We do some candidate giving. Most of it goes to [501](c)(4) groups because they both work on the campaign pieces and do the power building that we care about, and [...] they're accountable to communities in ways that feel really important."*

Participants also described a desire to learn more about the U.S. political system, but often pointed to a lack of understanding as the reason they weren't giving more to advocacy and 501(c)(4) organizations. Participant 18 stated, "I don't know enough yet to be able to make good choices." Instead, these participants relied on Resource Generation's partner organizations or recommendations from trusted peers to fund advocacy efforts.



## MUTUAL AID AND RAPID RESPONSE

Nearly all participants gave a portion of their contributions directly to individuals as mutual aid, often facilitated by local Resource Generation chapter listservs. Most interviewees allocated a certain share of their giving for cash assistance, ranging from 10% to as much as one-third of their giving budget. This was often done with little vetting of the need or recipient. It was also frequently done in relatively small enough amounts so the donor could freely say ‘yes’ without feeling compelled to pause, review, or question the gift. The COVID-19 pandemic influenced some participants’ desire to give in this way; but for most, sharing resources directly with community members—an aspect of redistributive social justice giving—fueled this type of giving. Participant 28 described it as “a way of just creating connection through supporting people.”

Other interviewees felt that mutual aid was another way to fulfill their social justice worldview, one that centers people who are the most marginalized, and complemented other ways they gave. Participant 25 shared:

*“It’s also an exciting time to be supporting sex-worker-led organizing, like really exciting legislative momentum. [...] From a mutual aid perspective, that’s also where a lot of my money goes. [...] Many sex workers were extremely negatively affected by the pandemic, which really refers to strip clubs [being] shut down, massage parlors [being] shut down. Many people who saw clients in person were not able to work for extended periods of time. The recession impacts the street sex market. And many sex workers, particularly undocumented sex workers, were shut out of federal relief efforts—so, [it is] a time when mutual aid is particularly needed.”*

Participant 24 described the type of individual they aim to support:

*“I am almost always looking for a Black person in a caregiving role. [...] So a recent [rapid response gift] was a Black grandmother, who recently gained custody of her two-year-old grandchild and is having a hard time making the rent that month. [...] But what kind of floats to the top of my mind is a Black person who provides care.”*

## SHARING RESOURCES DIRECTLY WITH FRIENDS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Several participants described giving significant, intentional gifts directly to friends and community members in need. This could be as simple as writing a small check to a roommate or as profound as funding the down payment on a friend's home. Several participants described using their resources to house friends or circumvent barriers to housing, like being a guarantor on a lease. Participant 13 described how meaningful it was to do this for a friend:

*"[We've] helped a couple of our friends either buy a house or stay housed, and that has felt really different than any other kind of giving I've done. [This] may not be true of every wealthy person, but I was raised to not talk about having money and to not make a loan to people you know because then they're just going to want to take advantage of you. And being in [a] deep enough relationship and being settled enough, I felt like [...] I can show up for you in this way in the way you showed up for me a million different ways; I'm like this is the thing that you need right now. That's been incredibly powerful. And it's not the largest gift by a long shot, but it's been so much of the giving we do because it's that stuff where we're the most impacted. Like, I'm giving to this amazing foundation which funds these amazing groups...versus like oh, this is my friend, and now she's going to be able to own her house."*

Participant 14 also described providing housing stability as one of the most meaningful gifts they had made to date:

*"The largest gift that I have done in one go I believe was \$10,000 to help [...] these two organizers who are both Black or Latinx and queer trans people, [who] grew up poor or working class, and they work for one of the organizations that I donate to that does LGBTQ youth stuff. And the two of them were trying to buy a house, and so there was a fundraiser [...] to help them buy this house. So I moved \$10,000 to that, and that was the most money that I had ever moved at one time. And it also felt cool for it to be something that was so concrete, like, this is literally going towards your down payment that will make this successful that otherwise would not be and will provide you with housing stability for hopefully many, many years, and all this stuff. And also, kind of in that time period, it was early in my sort of starting to make more money, starting to redistribute more and being like, alright, I'm going to just do this, like I'm going to give \$10,000."*



In addition to providing stable housing, interviewees gave many other examples of providing resources to friends or community members directly. Participants paid off credit card or student loan debt for friends; one offered their car and their mailing address to an unhoused neighbor. Reflecting on their inheritance, Participant 15 described this practice:

*“It’s because I feel so lucky, and it’s so nice to get these gifts, that I want other people to get to have that experience, too. Like, I really do value money in a lot of ways, and I feel so grateful for it. [...] I want other people to have that sense of feeling cared for in a very particular way.”*

### **Barriers to enacting social justice philanthropy**

The donors we interviewed recognize their wealth and class privilege and acknowledge the many benefits it affords them. Even with the best of intentions, however, social justice philanthropists are not immune from criticism. One critique is that the power relations inherent in philanthropic giving are so unequal that social justice giving cannot overcome them.<sup>34</sup> This tension recalls Peter Buffett’s description of philanthropists looking for solutions to problems with their right hand that were created by their left.<sup>35</sup> Another critique is that spending down inherited and earned wealth and “giving boldly” both push against society’s status quo, and are therefore difficult. In fact, giving away vast sums of money with a social justice goal is not as straightforward as it may seem. By understanding these barriers better, donors and practitioners can work together to construct solutions and encourage more donors to practice giving that aligns with social justice principles.

## **INTERRUPTING WEALTH ACCUMULATION**

Many participants inherited their wealth—not through any effort on their part but by virtue of the family they were born into. As a result, these participants described a pervasive feeling that the money they had was not really theirs. While all participants experienced some level of class privilege growing up, capitalist systems are designed to multiply that wealth over time. In addition to giving thoughtfully, interviewees also viewed curtailing the accumulation of even more wealth as an important part of their social justice focus. Many took this a step further, using their invested assets in creative ways to further their social justice goals.

Some participants had assets that were in restrictive trusts, and they were not able to access the principal, control investment decisions, or take out more than

an annual distribution. Many participants also recognized that while they had access to some wealth now, the total amount of their wealth would likely increase in the future, especially if they stood to inherit from their parents and grandparents. Participant 21 summed up this idea, saying, “I’ve drawn down the principal a little bit, but that stock has been growing so fast that I can give away a lot of money and not have it draw back down.” Participant 13 said, “If you don’t spend time actively shoveling money out the door, you’re just going to get wealthier.”

Many participants made gifts from both their assets and their personal income, often giving at least 5%-10% of their income away—and in some cases, much more. Participant 1 described how she has increased her giving over time and now gives away more each year than she and her husband earn in their paid work: “Figure out how much money you have and what percentage of that money you’re giving away and how that money is making money. And then begin to make commitments around not making money off of money to ramp up your giving.” Participant 10 described how understanding more about her money has shaped her giving, even if questions about how much money she stands to inherit remain:

*“Knowing the history [of my family’s wealth] and knowing the history of wealth accumulation in the United States, and trying to understand the economy, has made me feel like I don’t deserve this money. I didn’t do anything...you know, this is unfair, like, I was just born into this family. And I’m grateful, but I don’t need this money and it’s not fair that I have all this money. And so it has given me a lot of motivation to want to give away a lot of the money and to live, you know, a fairly simple life. At the same time, it’s hard to really make a goal or make a plan around...how much I’m going to give away...because I won’t really know until my father passes away how much money I will inherit.”*

## **TALKING ABOUT MONEY: THE FINAL TABOO?**

Study participants often struggled with social taboos associated with talking about money in the U.S. As individuals with class privilege, knowing how much money they actually have and/or have access to is an important step in planning their giving. In fact, one of the markers of class privilege is to downplay outward displays of wealth, as well as to avoid conversations about money.<sup>36</sup> This was true for our study participants, as well; as the children or grandchildren of wealth holders, some interviewees were not aware of how wealthy they truly were until they had explicit conversations with their families or received windfall inheritances. A few participants shared that even though they intentionally tried to learn more about their own wealth, they had no idea how much wealth their parents or grandparents held, and broaching those conversations with family members took a great deal of courage.





*“That’s a conversation I’m preparing to have with my parents in the next couple months. I want to be really intentional about the way that I approach it. [My sister] and I, when we hear or gather bits and pieces of information, we’ll share it with each other.”* –PARTICIPANT 4

*“I was always vaguely informed that my grandparents were giving me some money for when I was older.”* –PARTICIPANT 6

Participant 21 shared that when they attended their first Resource Generation conference, they didn’t think they had much wealth or access to wealth. During the conference, they completed a money survey, which led to a conversation with their father:

*“So as part of that survey, I filled it out as best I could, and then I called my dad to be like, ‘Hey, what do you think of these questions, is there anything else I’m missing?’ And he was like, ‘Oh, well, you have this portfolio of stocks that’s valued at a million dollars that’s all yours, like totally in your name and everything.’ And I was like, ‘What?’ It turns out, when I was eight, he had some money that he wanted to invest on my behalf and my siblings’ behalf and asked us...and we were kids, I was eight, and my siblings were four...what companies do you like? What companies do you want to own? And at the time, I said Apple. That was a very lucky, very good choice because it grew and grew and grew. So anyway, that was a huge moment for me. [...] I was like, [...] I need to be doing my own giving.”*

Participants also described the challenge of giving away significant amounts of their wealth or completely redistributing their assets without having determined how much money is enough to keep. As individuals in their twenties or thirties on the verge of or in new life phases (e.g., getting married, having children, buying houses), their answers to that question often changed over time. Some participants described how recognizing the abundance of their privilege freed them from their wealth and allowed them to make more significant redistributive gifts.

## **UTILIZING FINANCIAL VEHICLES AND SERVICES**

Once participants knew the specifics about their wealth, they often expressed a desire to give away significant portions of their wealth and assets, *and* they wanted their money to be managed in a way that aligned with their values. However, participants often faced challenges with gaining independent control of their money, navigating restrictions around accessing money held in a trust, and finding financial professionals to support their values and goals.



*“I’ve talked to my mom because the money manager is under [financial institution] and I don’t like [them], and I’ve talked to her about that. And I’m like, ‘What if I could put my money in a credit union or something like that?’ And she got sort of mad at me and was like, ‘When you’re 35 you can do whatever you want with it.’” –PARTICIPANT 5*

Some participants opted to work within the traditional financial system, a ‘making the best of it’ approach where they embraced impact investing, actively participated in shareholder advocacy, and tasked money managers to utilize investment ESG screens—or found new professional advisors who held more progressively-aligned values. Participant 21 described their role in corporate accountability by saying: “Now I do more shareholder advocacy, so I understand the benefits of owning Exxon, for example, and voting at their shareholder meeting.”

However, other participants shunned the market altogether, seeing it as another system tied to systemic injustice. These individuals described investing in the solidarity economy, funding CDFIs, or making other community-based low or no interest loans in traditionally underfunded spaces as an attempt to divest from Wall Street. One limitation to this practice was that these non-traditional “investments” often required investable assets of at least \$1 million; this figure was out of reach for some participants, including those who did not have full control over their assets. This minimum to being an accredited investor also forced some participants to rethink their redistribution or giving plans so that they could maintain the \$1 million dollar threshold and participate in the solidarity market.

## **PRIORITIZING THE “WORK” OF GIVING MONEY AWAY**

Once participants gained access to, and in some cases, control over their money, they had to invest significant time in actually giving that money away. Unlike older donors who may have been gradually exposed to nonprofits and expanded their giving over decades, only a few participants had meaningful experiences giving money away as children or teenagers—but they wanted to act quickly, rather than distribute assets over a lifetime. The Resource Generation network filled an important gap for these donors, providing connection to similar people who could share and model their experiences as a person of wealth/privilege, suggest aligned organizations to support, and challenge each other’s ideas on how much to give, where to invest, and the role of money in their lives.



*"I really try to trust the research of folks in RG and who have been in organizing spaces for a long time because I'm someone who likes to research and vet and find the experts and wants to be evidence-based. It's not what I have time or expertise to do myself. So I really like [...] getting to know people and their values and then hearing directly from some of the organizations." –PARTICIPANT 6*

*"I've appreciated RG.... I mean it's agitational and it's challenging and I think that is good because, as people with wealth, we can easily be really, really comfortable, and so much of traditional philanthropy can be just like really celebrat[ing] people for doing very, very, very little. So, you know, I think that the agitational nature of it puts some people off for sure, but for me, I've appreciated how it does challenge people."*

–PARTICIPANT 25

Participants described how giving tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars away with a social justice focus took time. For example, time- and energy-intensive actions included moving money from complex financial vehicles into more liquid accounts; obtaining actionable control over assets; having intentional conversations about money with family members, particularly parents or grandparents; and communicating a social justice mindset to financial professionals. Supporting intermediary organizations like social justice foundations or utilizing donor-advised funds were some ways participants simplified their giving. Participant 13 said:

*"Working with the DAF has really streamlined a ton of it and that's been super helpful. And it's one of the reasons [...] we do a lot of our giving through intermediaries, to cut down on the time intensity. It feels like an important way of shifting power over who's making the end-of-the-day decisions about where the money goes, but it's also 10 checks coming out of [my] one."*

Another participant described a similar experience supporting a social justice fund:

*"I don't have to do the research or due diligence around who to fund in a particular space or community. It feels nice to outsource that. Like North Star Fund, for example, is a community-led grantmaking model. And I think the other piece related to that is it's easier to hold one relationship with North Star Fund than 20 relationships with grantees. And I don't want to be responsible for navigating giving more or less to a particular organization [...]; I'd rather another entity handle that." –PARTICIPANT 21*

## NAVIGATING FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND GIVING

Nearly every interviewee in this study had some degree of inherited or family wealth, and thus they needed to navigate family relationships in their giving. Even participants who grew up with philanthropic families experienced contention around how much they wanted to give away or how they might influence their family members' giving. For participants whose family members had less experience with giving, the idea of giving so much money away so quickly—a common goal among Resource Generation members—was cause for concern. Participants who aimed to give away their entire inheritance found themselves at odds with their parents or grandparents who had set aside money in order to provide a stable future for their children or grandchildren.

*“I am very interested in spending down [all my inheritance] eventually. Every time I bring it up to my mom, she's like, ‘But what if you have kids? Don't you want them to have a good life?’”* –PARTICIPANT 5

For some participants, giving money away differed from an entrepreneurial parent's own wealth goals. Many described the ongoing and evolving nature of family conversations about giving, with Participant 15 saying:

*“One of my goals had been to talk to my dad about my [giving] plan. And essentially his response was, ‘If you want to give all your money away, fine, whatever. If you want to bankrupt yourself, you do that’—not in a friendly tone of voice. And now I think I've told him, and he trusts that I am competent to make good decisions for myself. But he's asked me if I don't want my inheritance, and I haven't taken him up on that—if and when to accept it. And he is still trying to accumulate as much as he can for us, but I think he mostly feels okay with what I'm doing with it.”*

In essence, participants wanted to be bold in their giving, without being seen as unwise or immature by their closest family members. On the one hand, interviewees wanted to share their social justice giving to encourage other family members to join them in giving more and giving to social justice organizations. On the other hand, participants did not want to worry their family or be written out of future assets they might be able to use for future giving. Participants also described the tension of maintaining family relationships for the sake of the relationship, and because those family members often maintained direct or indirect control over inherited wealth. One individual described this as even more difficult because of traditional gender roles in her family:



*“There's this kind of weird patchwork of investments that I don't even know about, and I've specifically asked my dad to give me a list of all these investments and the accounts that are tied to [him]. And it's very much like, ‘Don't worry, I'm taking care of it for you.’ So being a woman and a daughter, I think those two [identities] are very key.” –PARTICIPANT 21*

When participants navigated familial relationships successfully, their family members often acknowledged their expertise in giving with a social justice focus. This was particularly notable around the COVID-19 pandemic and racial justice protests after George Floyd's murder in 2020. Participant 1 described how, while their giving didn't significantly shift in 2020, they served as an example for friends and family interested in 'trying out' social justice philanthropy during this period:

*“[Funding racial justice] was already a priority area for me. I felt really well positioned to make suggestions to other people. Actually, our financial advisors recorded a podcast with me, my mom, and my brother for us to share our story because they had more clients coming to them asking them [...] about what they could do. Essentially, feeling transformed by that moment.”*

## **WORKING WITHIN A FLAWED SYSTEM OF PHILANTHROPY AND CAPITALISM**

Beyond the challenges of managing finances and talking with family members about their giving, participants also held the belief that they were giving away wealth within a flawed, capitalist system and using an imperfect system of philanthropy. This recognition of the inherent contradictions of social justice philanthropy was more prevalent among individuals who were further along in their social justice giving journey, or who had had access to significant wealth for many years. Participant 1, who had been involved with Resource Generation for nearly a decade and grew up with significant intergenerational wealth and family philanthropy, stated: “I think being a philanthropist is a beautiful thing, but it's so problematic.”

Participants found it challenging to simultaneously work toward a vision of a radically different society, while avoiding becoming disillusioned with the pace of change, being paralyzed by the complexity or vastness of their own wealth accumulation through these flawed systems, or analyzing these issues without taking action. Participant 13 expects to give away \$60 million over the next 10-15 years. She described wanting to be intentional about her giving while recognizing that philanthropy alone can't solve societal problems:

*“It’s a little bit of analysis paralysis...of wanting to get it right. But we’re moving \$3 million a year while we’re trying to get it right, so I don’t feel too bad about it. I definitely feel like we’re not doing enough, and I also have no sense of what doing enough would feel like in a context where we just have so much more money than everybody else in the world. And where so many of the things I really care about actually are not going to be solved by philanthropy. It’s like not wanting to get stuck in that place but also being like, ‘What is this?’”*

Social justice philanthropy prioritizes a community-based approach and authentic relationships. Despite the challenges to social justice giving described by participants, they also found that doing this work within and among a broader community, whether through Resource Generation or recipient organizations, helped them persist and work past barriers.

*“I want to be told where to give money, but also you have to connect [with it], I’ve realized, too, over the years. Because if your heart doesn’t really connect with your giving, I think you’ll end up giving less. And you might even stop giving because it kind of feels like a chore or a burden versus something that’s really heartfelt or just connected and aligned with your life force or something like that. [...] It was everything from just kind of trying to understand what was important to me, what were my values? [...] Is it community? Is it an issue? Is it family? Friends? Is it connection? And I think that’s a big one that’s come up for me again and again. [...] It’s like for me philanthropy is connection and giving is connection.” –PARTICIPANT 28*

### ***How personal identities drive social justice giving***

Philanthropy is often deeply personal. Like many donors, Resource Generation members and alumni generally gave to causes that resonated with them and that reflected their deeply held values around equity and justice. However, within the context of social justice philanthropy, participants had a more nuanced understanding of their own identities, and the role identity plays in society at large. Complex and intersectional social identities drove many participants’ giving to social justice causes. Stephanie Nixon uses the metaphor of a two-sided coin to describe “an intersectional approach to consider how systems of inequality, such as racism, heterosexism and ableism, interact to produce complex patterns of unearned disadvantage and advantage.”<sup>37</sup>



Resource Generation’s programming encourages members to learn about family histories and reflect on their ‘money stories’ to better understand where and how wealth was accumulated. It also encourages members to examine the role that systematic unearned advantages, or privileges, have played in their lives, as well as the role of oppressive social structures. Similarly, many participants sought to find clarity around their identity as a person with privilege, while simultaneously reflecting on and learning about their other identities that typically confer disadvantages. The sophistication through which participants grappled with their identity often enriched the landscape of causes and issues they cared about and shaped their giving. Participant 3, a trans man who is also a person of color, said:

*“Through my own understanding of who I am and the complexity and understanding of how I experience systems around me, I want to be giving to organizations or movements that are looking at liberation, and for the people in communities that are in most need.”*

He described how understanding himself has also made his giving more intersectional in nature, recognizing the complex dynamics of holding multiple identities, both ones with unearned advantage and ones with disadvantage or inequity.

Nearly all participants referenced how their privileged identities (being white, holding wealth, being cisgender, etc.) invoked a responsibility of ‘critical allyship’ in which they had to undergo a process of “learning and unlearning” and determine how to use their privilege to undo a system of inequality.<sup>38</sup> Many participants also referenced having one or more typically non-privileged, or oppressed identities, such as being a person of color, queer, gender non-conforming, or identifying as a woman. Participants recognized the challenges they experienced through their oppressed identities and often made some of their gifts directly to affiliated causes (i.e., a trans individual giving to nonprofits that provide services to trans people or a woman supporting reproductive rights). Participants also frequently described how their experiences of being ‘othered’ by virtue of holding an oppressed identity, allowed them to more fully appreciate the advantages that come with their other privileged identities, namely being white or being a person of wealth.

This outsider perspective, either as an outsider among their family or within the normal conventions of society, allowed participants to challenge societal norms, whether that be by redefining their family relationships, by creating their own family structures, or in their strategies for managing wealth and giving. Nearly all participants approached their giving through an understanding of oppression and empathy for others.

Identity is highly personal and unique: here, we present four vignettes as examples of how identity influences giving. Study participants held a broad collection of overlapping identities—some that come with systemic privilege and others that are typically marginalized—and their stories illustrate the impact of these identities on their social justice philanthropy.

### **VIGNETTE 1: COMING OUT AS BOTH WEALTHY AND QUEER**

Participant 21 is a 31-year-old, cisgender lesbian woman. She grew up with many markers of privilege, like going to private schools, and had philanthropic parents and grandparents who supported the arts, museums, and zoos. However, she wasn't fully aware of the extent of her family's wealth, its origin, or her own access to it, until she learned more about wealth inequalities in college and got involved in college protests during the Occupy Wall Street movement. She joined Resource Generation in 2012 and in the last year gave away more than \$500,000 to a variety of social justice causes, with a particular focus on worker organizing. When describing how her identity influences her giving choices, she shared that the connection is "clear":

*"In this one way [I'm] being marginalized [because of] being queer, but [I'm] also being super empowered because of being wealthy and white, trying to put those two in conversation. [...] You have to be out about being wealthy to be in RG. Who's better at coming out than queer people? So, I think it's no surprise that most RG members are queer people. Like we know how to 'do' shame, we know how to 'do' coming out. And so that, for sure, I was prepared to be able to come out as something that's a little bit taboo or that kind of weirds people out when you talk about it.*

*[I also have] more ability to withstand [...] disappointment from my parents or navigate tough family dynamics. My parents are way more upset about me being an anti-capitalist than being queer. They don't like the gay thing, but they like really don't like the anti-capitalist thing. It's growing on them, but the queer piece is definitely key."*

Looking forward, Participant 21 is also navigating her newer identities and how that will affect her giving: she is now a parent, a partner, and a homeowner.





## VIGNETTE 2: SUPPORTING BIPOC ORGANIZATIONS AS A VIETNAMESE AMERICAN

Participant 24 is a married, 37-year-old Vietnamese woman with a family. She identifies as a person with class privilege, and she owns her home; however, her family is low-income, in part because she and her husband choose to work part-time to devote time to their parenting and community care work. Her social justice philanthropy is driven by her recognition of how her class privilege affords her benefits in society and the mutual aid and community support she saw her parents give growing up. She and her husband primarily give locally and to organizations run by and for the benefit of BIPOC communities, including an Indigenous reparations organization. They designate a portion of their \$200-a-month giving budget for rapid response mutual aid. Many of the gifts they make are monthly contributions to nonprofits. They also view both paid and volunteer community-based work as part of their philanthropy, emphasizing the importance of giving time, energy, and care, along with their money. As a first-generation American of immigrant parents, she holds a number of marginalized identities, and describes their intersectionality as follows:

*“My identity shapes all of my giving. There isn’t really any part of it that [hasn’t]. I mean from the very basic level of why I give and the way that I gave is really how I was raised. And the way that I was raised is very contextually bound by race and class and immigrant status. A lot of our giving is very tied up into our identities: one, our identity as privileged people, racially and otherwise, directs a lot of our giving towards Black and Indigenous [people], so towards BIPOC organizations especially. And then there’s some piece of the giving that goes towards things like our identity as parents. [...] We give to Families of Color, which I’ve done a parent group with. It’s an organization we have a relationship with. We also give to Friends of Little Saigon, which is an important organization related directly to my identity. The big-picture giving is BIPOC giving with a real emphasis on Black and Indigenous people, and then a smaller circle of giving here relates to my Vietnamese identity. And then a smaller circle here related to our parenting identity. [...] That parenting identity often overlaps with racial stuff. Some of this also overlaps with our oldest child [being] nonbinary, [...] and so some of this also overlaps with like Gender Odyssey, trans families, you know, like some things that are about supporting the community our child is in, as well.”*

–PARTICIPANT 24



### VIGNETTE 3: 'GIVING JEWISHLY' WITH A JUSTICE APPROACH

As a white bisexual woman in her late 20s who is a rabbinical school student, Participant 20 fell into the highest asset bracket of participants as a first-generation inheritor and the beneficiary of several trusts. Her giving is heavily influenced by her Jewish values and faith, but she also points to connections with her race, and to a lesser extent, her sexual orientation and gender:

*"I definitely feel like being white and being a Jew are probably the top two modus operandi. I mean, having whiteness plus wealth, I believe you simply cannot sit on your butt. And especially with the kinds of forums of access that I do have, to do nothing is to perpetuate systems of inequity and violence. And so I feel like, operating from the knowledge of my privileges, I need to be accountable to people that I actually have a real relationship with. [...] And my sexual orientation and my gender, they're not big parts of my...operating in this realm. I don't give with those things in mind... I don't know why I don't, but I don't. But I love giving Jewishly. So, there's the place of accountability with my privileged identities, and there's a place of like groundedness and love for my people and love for all of the Jewish values that can ground my giving that makes the work enjoyable, as well, alongside all the relationships and the joy of being like, 'Yay, I've released the money to where it actually needs to be.'"*

—PARTICIPANT 20

While Participant 20 downplayed the role of gender in her giving, she notably supported the Third Wave Fund, in addition to a number of Jewish justice organizations, Black-led land organizations, the Movement for Black Lives, and organizations that focus on economic justice.

### VIGNETTE 4: IDENTIFYING AS A WOMAN AND A PERSON OF WEALTH

Participant 17 is a 36-year-old alumna of Resource Generation with over \$10 million in assets. She identifies as a queer woman. For inheritance tax reasons, she has already been receiving significant portions of her inheritance since her early twenties. Her family's wealth goes back several generations, and her lived experience has always been as a person of wealth. She came out as queer in high school, joined Resource Generation in graduate school, and has grappled with her wealth and practiced social justice philanthropy for more than a decade. She gives extensively in partnership with her mother, who has access to additional inherited wealth. She reflected on the intersectional nature of being a woman with wealth:



*“With the woman piece, I think a lot about proximity to privilege. [...] I was witness to a conversation years ago that has really stuck with me. It was someone who was connected with Third Wave Fund at the time, talking about how there's obviously a ton of women in philanthropy, and [...] that for wealthy white women, philanthropy is a space where you can have power. He was talking about the idea that—it's an oversimplification—but often you see it's like, the husband runs the company, and the wife runs the family foundation.”*

She went on to describe the tension of being a female social justice philanthropist:

*“As a wealthy woman, I have this tension between having a somewhat marginalized identity [being female] which makes me want to empower people with other marginalized identities. But also, as a woman, philanthropy is like the one place where I do have power and control. And so I think that I do feel this sort of tension as a wealthy woman straddling the fact that in philanthropic spaces, I get to have power in a way that women in a lot of other wealthy spaces maybe don't have power. [...] I, on the one hand, want to give up power because I think wealthy people should give up power. But as a woman, I want to hold on to power, because I think that there's value in exhibiting and demonstrating what it is to be a woman who holds power, because we do still live in a patriarchal society. And so, I think that I do feel and navigate that tension around how much power to hold or give up.”* —PARTICIPANT 17

While one or two aspects of a person's identity may be more relevant at any given time, these vignettes highlight the complexity and intersectionality of personal identities, and how participants' identities inform and propel their social justice philanthropy. Because participants held class privilege alongside other identities, some of which also caused them to experience marginalization, in many cases this tension strengthened their desire to be allies. Holding a marginalized identity does not make it inevitable that an individual will give to social justice causes. On the contrary, these vignettes—and all of the study participants—instead described the intentional self-reflection and ongoing learning about themselves and their roles in society that catalyzes them to give to social justice.

## DISCUSSION

This study highlights the many ways young, wealthy donors are attempting to pursue a social justice agenda with their philanthropy. Through their education and advocacy work, they have developed a sophisticated understanding of wealth accumulation, social structures, and associated inequality and injustice, allowing them to examine existing systems and their own place within them. The nature of identity and its influence on these participants' worldviews are crucial to understanding their social justice philanthropy. Identity-driven social justice acts, while integral to how many participants view themselves, require an additional level of intentionality and self-reflection.

These participants give generously to what they believe are social justice-aligned causes and purposes, and do so regardless of tax incentives. Participants shared how they gave directly to individuals, gave to organizations that centered people directly affected by issues, and gave in ways that allowed them to relinquish some of their own privilege and power.

Interviewees considered a wide variety of contributions and activities to be part of their social justice philanthropy. From making direct gifts to friends to offering their homes, participants frequently emphasized the breadth of their informal giving and formal resourcing. Similarly, interviewees explained that their social justice views required them to explore how their wealth was invested. Investing beyond the market, perhaps in low- or no-return loans, and actively working to decrease their assets, were ways many participants sought to practice social justice philanthropy. This often created conflict with family members whose wealth was intertwined with their own.

Participants also frequently described an effort to stretch or challenge themselves to give greater amounts or in new ways, leaning into unfamiliarity and experimentation. Their idealism, however, was not unchecked. Many recognized that they operated within a flawed capitalist system and expressed that they often felt constrained by their wealth.

By highlighting the ways younger donors give to and think about social justice causes, this research also highlights some core tensions inherent in social justice philanthropy. These tensions, some of which were explicitly mentioned by the participants themselves, are described in Figure 2.



**FIGURE 2: Core tensions in social justice philanthropy**



While several participants joined Resource Generation in 2020, few launched their philanthropy into action because of that year’s events. However, many interviewees cited the pandemic, the racial justice protests and unrest brought on by the murder of George Floyd, and the increasing wealth gap as evidence of the need to continue funding social justice. Participant 28 described the timing of a financial liquidation event during what he described as the “George Floyd summer,” which allowed him to give “after tax[es] almost \$2 million overnight” to racial justice causes. Like other participants in this study, he described how he was largely already giving to these areas. Participant 28 expressed that if the events of 2020 had any lasting or significant influence, it was that Resource Generation members were able to act as subject matter experts and resources for friends and family members who were interested in social justice philanthropy as well.

This study is not the final word on social justice philanthropy. On the contrary, this interview-based research is a starting point for better understanding how a specific group of donors is thinking about and practicing social justice giving. In the future, we look forward to expanding this work, especially to understand how donors who do not have access to significant financial resources or to a network like Resource Generation give to social justice.

## IMPLICATIONS

It is our hope that this study can be a resource for anyone interested in learning more about—or giving to—social justice causes.

### *For individual donors and their families*

This research describes concrete actions that individuals who wish to donate to social justice causes can take. These donors can scrutinize their current nonprofit partners and analyze how those organizations are centering marginalized groups. Donors might think back to their most recent gifts and consider how they are ceding power to both organizations and under-funded groups. Each of the six practices of social justice philanthropy can be applied to donors' existing giving, to put a greater focus on social justice. In taking stock of their social justice giving, donors must be intentional about exploring their own identities, and working to better understand themselves and their role within social structures.

Donors wishing to give to social justice-aligned organizations should note that not all organizations in this space use language that would identify them as movement-focused. Participant 22 described learning this the hard way in their own giving:

*“There were some organizations that were great at talking about their complex racial justice analysis. From the perspective of over-educated, education-privileged young folks, we heard that language. We got that language. The organizations that were led by folks of color didn't lead with that because that's their everyday life. And unless the organization really had that knowledge on staff [...] to talk in foundation-speak like that, we completely missed it.”*

Within families with shared philanthropic efforts, younger donors may bring a more social justice-oriented perspective that differs from longstanding philanthropic traditions, and these families may benefit from having open dialogue about philanthropic goals and values and a willingness to reconsider traditional giving practices. While these perspectives can seem to disregard deeply held family values or diminish accomplishments, shifting to a curious and open mindset can help maintain fragile family relationships. Moreover, family advisors would also benefit in being receptive to this more progressive perspective in hopes of maintaining next generation clients and possibly also serving as a mediator for challenging conversations.



This study highlights young donors with class privilege, but people at any wealth level, any age, or any stage in their giving journey can support social justice. A key tenet of social justice giving is that it is cross-class, and that philanthropy is more than giving by dominant elites. Those who are interested in but have not yet begun donating with a social justice lens can start with a small first step. Donors do not need to start by using all six social justice practices outlined in this report, nor do they need to give all of their donations to social justice causes. A small gift, or a gift focusing on one practice at a time, is a good start.

### ***For organizations***

This research underscores the importance of understanding donors' identities in fundraising and donor relations. While this study had a small sample size, nearly 70% of interviewees identified as women, mirroring the broader gender demographic makeup of Resource Generation. This may indicate that women are more drawn to social justice work or to the type of community offered by Resource Generation. High-net-worth women donors express being more drawn to addressing systemic issues over immediate needs, perhaps because of their own gender-specific experiences.<sup>39</sup> Given that the Great Wealth Transfer will largely end up in the hands of younger women, social justice organizations should ensure they are being inclusive of women and understand their philanthropic power.<sup>40</sup>

While this study did not seek to explicitly look at how women give to social justice causes, many of the findings align with research about women's giving. While participants overwhelmingly identified as female, this aspect of identity does not operate in isolation from other identities, such as race or sexual orientation. This intersectionality is important to note: nonprofits and other social justice organizations should be cautious about making assumptions about identity. This report emphasizes that while social identity is often a driver of social justice-aligned giving, it is also extremely nuanced.

Given the economic uncertainty faced by many charitable organizations, this research provides an encouraging outlook for nonprofits and other organizations working in the social justice space, based on a small group of donors. The participants in this study give in creative ways that seek to shift power from them as donors and into the hands of recipients. They are unconcerned with an organization's tax-exempt status and care more about its mission and vision. The interviews also provide concrete examples of how organizations can reach and more effectively speak to these donors and potential donors—for example, by using certain terms and phrases these donors more readily recognize.

## *For the field*

A 2022 Women's Philanthropy Institute study on racial justice philanthropy found that people's definitions of this giving were both broad and diverse.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, this study found that participants did not define social justice philanthropy as giving to a specific type of organization. Instead, interviewees described social justice philanthropy as the 'how' or the process by which they gave, rather than simply where they gave.

Interviewees tended to have an expansive view of what counted as social justice philanthropy. They also frequently used terms like "funding" or "resourcing" interchangeably with "philanthropy." Participants' willingness to give to organizations, movements, and individuals regardless of tax incentives highlights the breadth and variety of philanthropic activity. How might the field more fully capture all the diverse philanthropic acts or informal giving that individuals contribute? The "all-in" nature of philanthropy was also described anecdotally in two 2019 studies by WPI.<sup>42</sup> In this way, social justice giving is likely to challenge traditional definitions of philanthropy moving forward.

The events of 2020—in particular, the COVID-19 pandemic and the racial justice protests in response to George Floyd's murder—have been cited as catalysts for increased social justice giving.<sup>43</sup> However, most participants in this study had already been giving with a social justice lens for a number of years. Rather than any one large-scale event, it was frequently the desire for community and shared understanding that led participants to Resource Generation and set them on this path. Research has established a link between significant wealth and isolation or loneliness;<sup>44</sup> networks like Resource Generation and the practice of social justice giving may provide an avenue to combat that loneliness. These donor communities and peer networks—including Women's Funding Network, Donors of Color Network, the Giving Project Network, and Solidaire—are also integral parts of the social justice philanthropic infrastructure, encouraging individuals to learn about issues, engage in advocacy, and give together. Donors in this study see themselves as working to dismantle systems that consolidate, maintain, and grow wealth and power—and they see networks like Resource Generation as vital resources enabling them to persist in their giving journey.





Study participants expressed a need for additional services or support in their giving. Interviewees stated that it was challenging to find advisors they felt they could depend on to enact their social justice aims. It seemed few trusted advisors, from financial and investment professionals to wealth coaches and family therapists, were available to help guide them on this particular path. Additionally, donors ultimately “age out” of Resource Generation after age 35. As these alumni moved into new life phases, such as being a partner or a parent, there didn’t seem to be an organization serving as a communal hub to help them navigate these new challenges.

This study is based on a small sample of young, wealthy donors who have benefited from a network—Resource Generation—to support their social justice efforts. Even so, knowledge gleaned from these interviews represents a significant advancement in understanding the practice of social justice philanthropy. As young, social-justice-minded donors age, inherit, and continue their philanthropic journeys, this study contributes practical insights for how these donors can approach their giving; how social justice organizations can more effectively connect with such donors; and how the field can better understand how donors’ complex and intersectional identities influence their philanthropy.



## APPENDIX: KEY TERMS

**501(c)(3):** Under Internal Revenue Service (IRS) rules, a 501(c)(3) is a nonprofit for religious, charitable, or educational purposes. Donations to these organizations are tax-deductible, and they can only engage in a limited amount of lobbying or political activity and are prohibited from endorsing specific candidates.<sup>45</sup>

**501(c)(4):** Under IRS rules, a 501(c)(4) is a social welfare group. Donations to these organizations are not tax-deductible, and they can engage in unlimited lobbying and politics compared to 501(c)(3)s.<sup>46</sup>

**Accredited investor:** Certain securities offerings may only be offered to, or purchased by, those who are “accredited investors.” A person or an entity may qualify as an accredited investor based on wealth and income thresholds, as well as other measures.<sup>47</sup>

**Anti-capitalist:** Opposed to or against capitalism—an economic and political system in which property, business, and industry are controlled by private owners rather than the state, with the purpose of making a profit.<sup>48</sup>

**Cisgender:** Of, relating to, or being a person whose gender identity corresponds with the sex the person had or was identified as having at birth.<sup>50</sup>

**Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI):** CDFIs are private-sector financial intermediaries that promote financial inclusion by providing credit and financial services to underserved populations, with community development as their primary mission.<sup>49</sup>

**Conscious capitalism:** A socially responsible economic and political philosophy which posits that businesses should operate ethically by serving the interests of all stakeholders, rather than just corporate management and shareholders.<sup>51</sup>

**Critical allyship:** Work by those in a position of privilege toward dismantling a system of inequality, in solidarity with those oppressed by the system.<sup>52</sup>

**Donor-advised fund (DAF):** DAFs are charitable investment accounts controlled by a 501(c)(3) nonprofit called a sponsoring organization. Individual donors contribute to these funds for the sole purpose of supporting charitable organizations.<sup>53</sup>

**Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Investing:** Also known as sustainable investing, socially responsible investing, and impact investing, ESG investing is a way of investing in companies based on their commitment to one or more ESG factors.<sup>54</sup>



**Heteronormative:** Of, relating to, or based on the attitude that heterosexuality is the only normal and natural expression of sexuality.<sup>55</sup>

**LGBTQ+:** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer. The plus sign represents other identities in the queer community, such as Asexual, Agender, Intersex, Genderqueer, Non-binary, Pansexual, Questioning, and Two-Spirit.<sup>56</sup>

**Mutual aid:** Reciprocal aid and cooperation among people within and across social groups.<sup>57</sup>

**QTBIPOC:** Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous, People of Color. This term also highlights BIPOC people within the LGBTQ+ community.<sup>58</sup>

**Shareholder advocacy:** Also known as shareholder activism, this involves shareholders using equity stakes in corporations to put pressure on management.<sup>59</sup>

**Solidarity economy:** Also known as solidarity market or social solidarity economy, an ethical and values-based approach to economic development that prioritizes the welfare of people and the planet over profits and growth.<sup>60</sup>

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