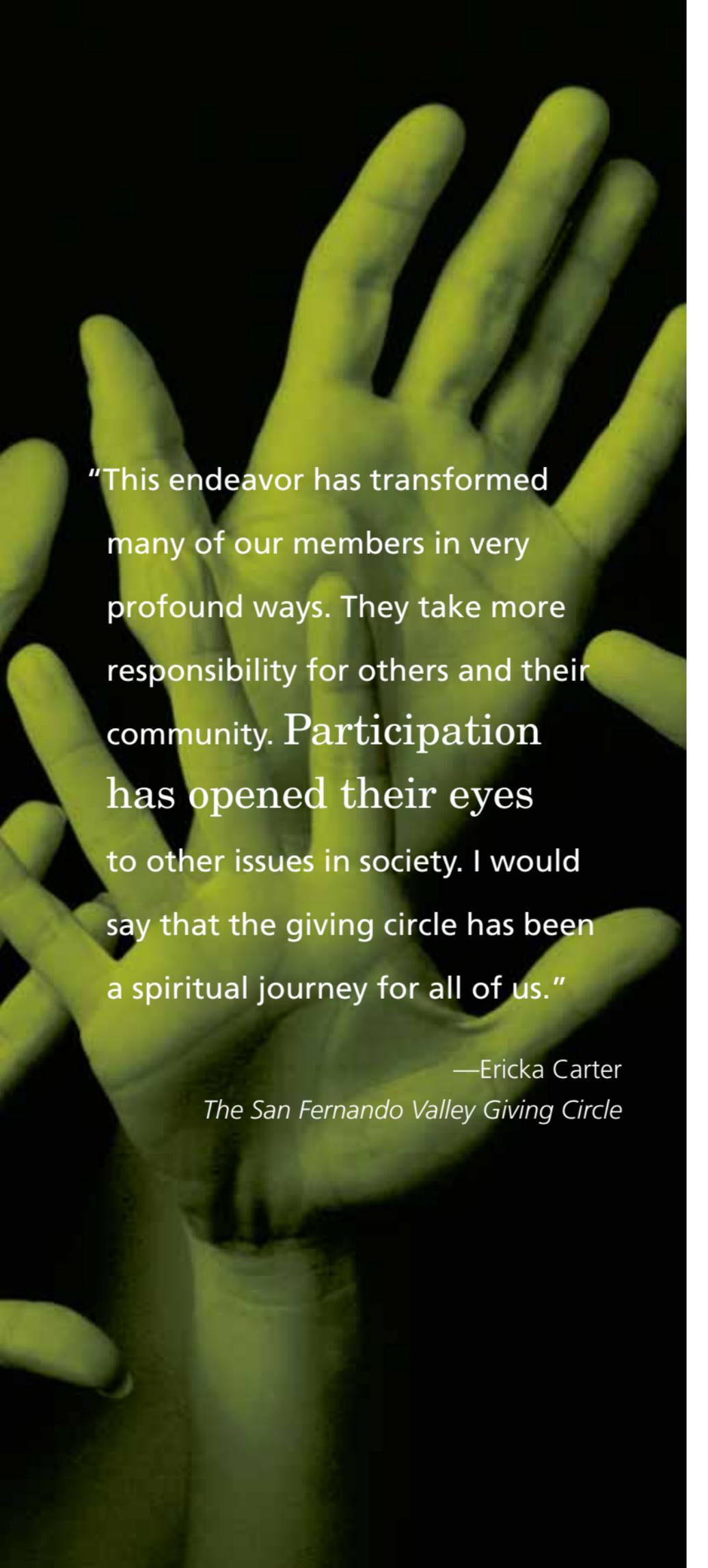




more  
giving  
together

THE GROWTH AND IMPACT

of GIVING CIRCLES and SHARED GIVING



“This endeavor has transformed many of our members in very profound ways. They take more responsibility for others and their community. **Participation** has opened their eyes to other issues in society. I would say that the giving circle has been a spiritual journey for all of us.”

—Ericka Carter

*The San Fernando Valley Giving Circle*

## giving circles make change

Across the country, in small towns and big cities, individuals are gathering to learn about their communities, to network, and to enjoy each others' company. At the same time, they are combining their money and deciding where to donate it. They are giving grants that improve lives and address the pressing needs of their communities.

These *giving circles*, as they are commonly called, can be small and informal or formally staffed organizations. Individually, giving circles are often low-key. They meet in living rooms and community centers, rely on volunteer staff, and quietly go about the business of improving the world.

But cumulatively, giving circles are a powerful force – one that is growing each year. According to a recent study by the Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers...

- In 2006, giving circles gave \$13 million for community needs.
- Giving circles have raised and given nearly \$100 million.
- Nearly 12,000 people learn and give through giving circles.

This brochure will explain how giving circles work, why they are an important trend in philanthropy, and how you can get involved with giving circles or start one of your own!

## giving circles make sense

Giving circles are a simple and powerful concept. A giving circle is formed when individuals come together, combine their dollars in a shared fund, decide collectively where to give the money, and learn about their community and philanthropy.

Giving circles simply make sense. It makes sense that donors can accomplish more good, learn more, make better decisions, and have more fun when they give together.

Giving circles come in all shapes and sizes:

- The Brooklyn, New York-based group One Percent for Moms meets in a living room and makes all decisions through discussion and consensus.
- The 57-member Latino Giving Circle partners with a host organization, the Chicago Community Trust, which holds its money and writes the checks when the giving circle makes its grants.
- The Washington Women's Foundation in Seattle, Wash., engages more than 400 women, has its own nonprofit status and a staff of four. Each year, its members grant more than \$800,000.
- Dining for Women, an event-based giving circle, began in South Carolina and has since spread to more than 40 other locations. Members gather for monthly potluck dinners and donate money to improve the lives of women and children internationally.



giving circles make  
**communities**  
better

“These are women who understand the simple concept of **generosity and connection to others**. They want to contribute back to their community and make it better.”

—Ana Gloria Rivas-Vazquez  
*Smart Women with Spare Change, Key Biscayne, Fla.*

At a time when individuals seem increasingly disengaged from each other, giving circles promote collective learning, decision-making, and giving. They build community by rallying individuals who have meaningful conversations and make real world decisions.

“Think of it this way...we’ve now been doing this for five years and we have given to and learned about 25 nonprofits in our town. **If you look at our impact cumulatively, it’s really terrific.**”

—Carol Hahn  
*Red Heart Society, Omaha, Neb.*

Giving circles make grants to nonprofit organizations small and large, as well as to individuals and community groups. Although some giving circles fund regionally, nationally, or even internationally, the majority of them fund within their immediate communities. Giving circles’ grants address a wide array of issues, including women and girls, education, youth development, health and nutrition, community improvement and the arts.

## giving circles make friends

“I think that the **camaraderie, mutual connections and friendships** we have really drive the forward motion of the process.

The more of that we have, the better we are and the more cohesive we are. And the less we have, the less heart we have....”

—Weston Millikin  
*Queer Youth Fund and ADaM giving circles*

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Any giving circle member will tell you, emphatically, that there’s more to a giving circle than making grants. Whether formal or informal, circles provide a safe and stimulating learning space and create opportunities to network and socialize. Often members see the social aspect as one of their circle’s most important functions – the lure that keeps everyone coming back.



Giving circles attract donors who might not have considered themselves “philanthropists.”

- Women, who comprise about 81 percent of giving circle donors, find shared giving to be a welcoming, supportive and empowering gateway to philanthropy. While many giving circles are exclusively female, nearly half of all giving circles are co-ed and several men-only circles also exist.
- Some giving circles, like AsiaNextGen in New York City or the New Mountain Climbers in Blacksburg, Va., engage donors and make grants within a specific racial or ethnic community. Others, like Gather and Give: Let’s Eat in Washington, D.C., target young donors who want to pool their limited dollars to make a difference. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) giving circles often focus explicitly on funding LGBT issues.
- Giving circles also appeal to donors from all walks of life. Some giving circles establish low giving levels and appeal to donors without a lot of spare cash. Other giving circles require a higher annual monetary commitment – as much as \$100,000 per donor in one case. Most giving circles fall between these two extremes, requesting \$500 to \$1000 in donations each year.



## giving circles make a difference

Giving circles form to give grants to the community, but their impact may be greatest on their own members, whose lives are changed through the act of giving.

Giving circle members contribute well beyond their donation to the pooled fund. They give additional money, volunteer and serve on nonprofit boards. Some members roll up their sleeves and provide technical assistance to community organizations, including fundraising assistance or marketing advice.

When Tim McIntosh became a member of the Next Generation of African American Philanthropists (NGAAP) giving circle, he had no idea that his business – a barber school in Durham, N.C. – would change dramatically as a result of his involvement. As he learned more about giving and community needs, he became more aware that people who had been incarcerated often had trouble finding good work after they got out of jail, making them more likely to commit another crime. He decided that he could make a difference in the community by using his barber school to train ex-offenders. Tim's work with the NGAAP giving circle wasn't just inspirational; it also gave him access to community leaders who could help him make his dream a reality. His students, who now include six ex-offenders, learn how to cut hair and gain valuable business skills to help them succeed.

According to Tim: **“The giving circle keeps me engaged.** I'm learning and growing and being strategic about what I can do to build and strengthen our community.”

## giving circles make waves

Giving circles are contagious: making a giving circle come alive takes energy, dedication and hard work – and it is something that anyone can do!

If you are inspired to learn more about giving circles, support a giving circle, join a giving circle, or start a giving circle, here are some first steps:

- 1. Gather friends and acquaintances who share your interest in making a difference.** Develop a shared vision for a giving circle and the causes and organizations you want to support.
- 2. Figure out the basics:** how much will each person give? Where will you keep the pooled money?
- 3. Make a plan for selecting grantee organizations.** Will you seek and review proposals? Take recommendations from members?

For more information on starting a giving circle, visit the Giving Circle Knowledge Center at [www.givingforum.org/givingcircles](http://www.givingforum.org/givingcircles).

### *Join a giving circle*

There may already be a giving circle in your region! Check the Forum's list of known giving circles at [www.givingforum.org/givingcircles](http://www.givingforum.org/givingcircles). Or begin asking around in your community – many giving circles welcome new members.

### *Host a giving circle*

If you are a nonprofit organization or a community foundation, you can support giving circles by serving as a host organization. Hosts hold the giving circles' money and provide some administrative assistance. For more information about hosting giving circles, visit the Knowledge Center at [www.givingforum.org/givingcircles](http://www.givingforum.org/givingcircles).

### *Learn more about giving circles*

Maybe you are intrigued by this idea and would like to learn more. Research, fact sheets and links to other giving circle-related information can be found online in the Knowledge Center at [www.givingforum.org/givingcircles](http://www.givingforum.org/givingcircles).

## The **Mission** of the Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers:

The Forum supports, connects and expands geographic associations of grantmakers to strengthen and increase philanthropy.

## The Forum's **Role** in Philanthropy's Infrastructure:

We contribute as a leader and collaborator in philanthropy's infrastructure, which we view as integral to philanthropy's growth and impact.

Specifically, we:

- Develop and share knowledge about growing new giving, philanthropic trends, emerging issues and informed practice;
- Amplify the voice of regional associations in discussions of policy and practice; and
- Provide partnership opportunities to colleague organizations and funders.

The New Ventures in Philanthropy initiative at the Forum provides communities, and the individuals, organizations and networks within them, with the tools and resources to grow philanthropy and address pressing community needs.

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