

The Donor's Mind: Why People Give to Literacy and Education Non-profits

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In today's world, nonprofit organizations are crucial in boosting literacy and education by funding schools to increase literacy rates in California. In order to address this problem, it is necessary to assess why people donate to nonprofits in the literacy field and the motivations behind these donations that support thousands of schools in the state. In this paper, I analyzed the motivations behind donations to multiple literacy and education nonprofit organizations from research conducted through eight interviews selected from donors located in San Mateo County in 2024 who have had personal experiences donating to literacy nonprofits. This paper draws on a literature review of education, policy and management, public administration, and social economics journals and popular media on nonprofits and businesses. This paper finds that (1) donors sustain their connections to the nonprofit through their personal relationship with the mission of the nonprofit, (2) common ground creates new communities within nonprofits, and (3) donors have diverse ideas regarding credit, earmarking, and expenditure. Despite California's reputation as an economically wealthy state, literacy has become a significant problem in a high-income society. Through the research and exploration presented in these topics, researchers will be able to develop a basis of understanding of how nonprofit organizations utilize methods of donation to retain and attract new donors.

Keywords: donor, anthropology of business, literacy, education, sociology of nonprofits, donor motivations, philanthropy

Introduction

The indispensable role of nonprofits in California has been long-lasting since the 19th century. From topics surrounding education and schooling to literature and arts, nonprofits serve as a way outside of the government to help raise and distribute money to a chosen cause. The problem of illiteracy rates in California has been detrimental due to a lack of supported public education in schools. Currently, less than half of public schools in the area meet the standards of principal English and Language Arts principles set by the California Department of Education, which critics have stated is due to a lack of public funding caused by challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic school closures^{1,2}. Despite California's standing as one of the most expensive states in the nation, it fails to conduct a nurturing literacy program for elementary children. In recent years, an increasing number of nonprofits have launched with motives to diversify typical reading standards, improve language and vocabulary, and build community in California.

There are many different motives for donating, depending on who someone is. In an article published by the Wall Street Journal, Jane Hodges stated, "A donor motivated by direct service might give to a food bank. Another donor might fund a nonprofit research initiative that spots problems in the food supply chain and makes more or better food available to the food bank.

Which one you give depends on what you hope to achieve"³. Donor relations, as portrayed in popular business media, are understood in terms of donors' impact on their agenda. In order to acknowledge the success of such nonprofits, one must understand why people are willing to donate to nonprofits, what influencing factors play a role, and the importance of donations from a donor's perspective. This paper asks: why do people donate to literacy and education nonprofit organizations based on motivations through personal connections, types of donations, as well as credit, recognition, and impact. In the following sections, I will discuss how factors such as personal connections, types of donations, and recognition play a part in donations to literacy and education nonprofits and ultimately explain the impact of these factors on donors overall.

Methods

Effectively posing this question requires assessing its previous iterations through a literature review. By researching keywords such as nonprofit operation, growth, work, marketing, process, donors, trends, clients, external environment, and resources, I examined the impact of various elements to address this. To find pre-existing research on what pushes people to donate to nonprofits, I used a selection criteria of sources between 1950 and the present containing keywords such as "donor motivations,

nonprofit organizations, and sociology of nonprofits”. This yielded 15 books, articles, and scholarly papers which were selected for analysis and synthesis.

Another significant method used to answer this research question is qualitative methods, specifically through interviews. In order to gain a firsthand perspective on the importance of donating, it was necessary to seek out donors, donor liaisons, and CEOs of nonprofits who would be willing to be interviewed. Individuals were targeted for recruitment into the study due to their location in San Mateo County and expertise in literacy and education nonprofits or personal connection with donating. Beginning this process, I initially contacted over 50 education and literacy nonprofit organizations in California through multiple calls and emails requesting an interview or reference. I researched local platforms and larger community foundations in California to find nonprofits that matched my preferences. I found sites like California Library Literacy Services and the San Francisco Foundation to search for similar nonprofits and contact information. Of the many people I contacted, only five nonprofits were interested in my project, but it dwindled to two nonprofits with whom I could set up an interview. In addition to tackling outside sources, I used connections among my friends and family to find two other donors whom I could interview efficiently. After spending around three to five weeks sending email after email, I eventually ended with eight total interviews set up. Before my interviews, I drafted around 50 interview questions, divided among the three types of interviewees: donors, donor liaisons, and CEOs. I spent time developing these questions to fit and provide insight into my research topic, with questions covering topics such as reputation and modes of donations will be explored later in my paper. Most of my interviews were online due to convenience, and three were in person. I recorded the eight interviews using Otter AI, an online platform that transcribes, records, and takes notes on interviews. I used a quality control check by listening to the recorded interviews in addition to utilizing the transcription the app provided to spot check accuracy throughout the transcript. I used Otter AI to track how long I spent interviewing donors and find specific parts of the interview I needed to pinpoint. My interviews lasted from a short time of 10 minutes to a lengthy 35 minutes at most. To minimize the possibility of fabrication in the interviewees’ responses I verified to the extent possible the relationship they claimed to nonprofits through public facing online content. For example, I researched my interviewees’ background through the nonprofit’s website and donor lists to ensure they were actually a donor.

I constructed a chart [Table 1] briefly illustrating donors and their characteristics. I used generic, fake names for the eight donors but listed descriptions such as income (broadly), age, and gender. Most of these sections were determined by perception during the interviews, except income level, which the interviewee brought up. These specific variables regarding demograph-

ics are essential to contextualize each person’s perspective and provide the insight necessary to understand the answers they provided.

When referring to “low-income” and “high-income,” it is important to contextualize what this might mean in different areas. These averages apply to this area since my qualitative data is solely from San Mateo County, California. In 2023, The California Department of Housing and Community Development released its most recent data about household income by county. As one of the three highest-ranking counties in California, from an income standpoint, San Mateo County’s average income levels differ heavily from other parts of the state. Below is a chart showcasing average income levels⁴.

Networks of Personal Connection

One of the most common factors when determining why people donate to literacy and education nonprofits has proven to be because of personal connections. Business journalists have even observed this and found that rallying friends to donate is one of the most influential ways to get people to donate to nonprofit organizations³. Interpreting a personal connection can vary, ranging from knowing a friend involved in a nonprofit to experiencing the same issue a nonprofit strives to solve. When I asked eight subjects whether or not they had a personal connection to the cause—any of the ways listed above—six people I spoke with said yes. This section of my paper will examine the aspects of profession, culture, affiliation, personal experience, and gender that people described as their primary motives for donating.

One example of a type of personal connection to a literacy nonprofit’s cause is through culture. Grace has donated to a specific nonprofit for 20 consecutive years for various reasons regarding her connection with the topic. On top of family-friend connections to a nonprofit, she had a particular interest in literacy due to her Jewish culture, which endorsed reading since childhood. Explaining that reading is a staple in her culture, Grace said, “Reading is something that Jewish culture values in a way that is deeply ingrained in me that I don’t even need to acknowledge it,” she explained, “There are always books in the house. If you can afford books, you have books, and you read through your entire life. I mean, that’s just what you do.” This commonality and core value in their family’s life played a role in determining the importance of literacy nonprofits. Because of Grace’s deeply ingrained cultural values since childhood, she remains immersed in her beliefs about the importance of reading for herself and her children. Grace’s action shows how cultural background and values can contribute to donating to a nonprofit with a literacy and education cause. In his paper “Why do People Give?: New Evidence and Strategies for Nonprofit Managers” Van Slyke argues that culture also plays a role in giving. The article summarized the link between religious affiliation and

Table 1 Summary of Donors

Donors	Age	Gender	Income*	Marital Status	Religious Affiliation	Profession	Race	Donates to...***
Grace (1)	50s	Female	High-income	Married	Jewish background	None	White	GoRead**
Brian (2)	50s	Male	High-income	Married	Not specified	Tech Company	White	GoRead**
Claire (3)	60s	Female	Moderate-income	Not specified	Not specified	Public school teacher	White	LiteracyFun**
Lily (4)	70s	Female	Low-income as a child, now moderate-income	Married	Not specified	Not specified	White	LiteracyFun**
Sarah (5)	60s	Female	Low-income as a child, now moderate-income	Married	Not specified	CEO of LiteracyFun**	White	None
Mia (6)	50s	Female	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	Donor Liaison of HappyReads**	Black	None
Kristy (7)	60s	Female	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	Works at a local Community Foundation	White	FunLiterature**
Mark (8)	40s	Male	High-income	Married	Not specified	Venture Capitalist	White	HappyReads**

*self-reported
 **nonprofit names are also pseudonyms for the privacy of the nonprofit
 ***Referring to the nonprofits that most of the interview questions about nonprofits were centered around

Table 2 Income Averages

High-income Averages (Mean of top 5%)	Median Income (Middle percentile)	Low-income Averages (Mean of bottom 20%)
\$678,000	\$175,000	\$22,600

altruism, ultimately showing that the more involved a person is in church groups, the more willing they are to donate—likewise with volunteering—as I will discuss later in section three⁵.

On the other hand, personal experience with nonprofits can be just as significant as cultural ideas or background. Having to retire due to a disability, Lily began volunteering her time and money in an attempt to help children who experienced similar issues growing up. Growing up low-income and lacking a “solid” education, Lily considered her experience when focusing on literacy and education-based philanthropies. “Seeing kids living in poverty and seeing what they experience and how hard it is for them. . .” she said, “starting kindergarten behind because the parents don’t have the resources they need, or have the knowledge, just tears my heart. “This is something I care so much about.” Her passion for the mission and her experience parallels the cause she aims to attribute to. Knowing how a lack of education, especially in low-income families, affects child development reveals how core values from first-hand involvement affect a donor’s interest in a cause.

Another aspect that Grace recognized as contributing to her donations was the focus on literacy and education of women in the nonprofit she was donating to. This facet of the nonprofit appealed to her as a woman and a supporter of education through her culture and beliefs. “Particularly for girls, but literacy is the stepping-stone to education. For everybody, Education is the stepping-stone to enter your life for the better. Learning how to read can change your life. It changes your family’s life, it changes your trajectory, and it can change the town you come back to. It is a multiplier of improving somebody’s life.” Viewing her contribution to making a change in various ways, Grace recognizes the importance of women in the workforce, viewing stable literacy as “a stepping-stone” to living a fulfilled life. Her interest in gender contributes to her urgency, and she needs to donate to this nonprofit.

Moreover, Grace’s affiliation as a woman also contributes to her sense of contribution to this nonprofit. Gender plays a

role in statistics on donations to various nonprofit organizations, revealing Grace’s action. Support for this idea comes from studies such as Van Slyke, who proposed that women tend to be more altruistic or willing to give than men. Adding on, a study done by Stanford University debunked common philanthropic myths, with some involving the role of women in nonprofits⁵. “Spouses with higher levels of education, income, or knowledge of household finances tend to have greater control over financial decisions. These factors have resulted in more women-led nonprofit organizations and funding initiatives playing an increasingly larger role in the sector”⁶. Parallel to how women are more altruistic than men, this idea is similar to patterns when leading a nonprofit—also visible in Sarah’s commitment to LiteracyFun.

Another influential factor when donating to a literacy nonprofit is affiliation or relationship with someone involved in or supporting the same nonprofit. Grace recognized that a contributing factor to her donations was her friend’s involvement in the nonprofit she donated to. “There’s sort of a philanthropy thing: I’ll donate to your organization, and you donate to mine, which happens a lot,” she explained. This perspective of supporting close friends is a common trend among many high-income donors, where giving is essential to encourage and sustain others you want to see succeed. As well as her care for education mentioned earlier, Grace acknowledged that her friend’s involvement also played a hefty role in donating. “Part of the reason was just to support [her friend]; part of it was because I think reading is essential and literacy is critical,” she said. Similarly, Brian appealed to the same aspects when donating. His connection to friends resulted in a similar element of donating to one another.

In addition, professions can also be a significant viewpoint when donating to literacy and education nonprofits. Working as an elementary public school teacher in Silicon Valley, Claire had first-hand experience with literacy at a young age and saw the impact it brought kids during their childhood. “I really believe that grades zero to five are the most impactful time to be

with young children by setting the stage for literacy,” she noted. Claire observed that people in professions that typically work on the topic identified in the nonprofit’s mission statement are more likely to donate.

Another equally influential motive brought up by multiple interviewees was the role of finance in donations. As hypothesized, many large-scale donations are products of high-income donors. Adding to wealth as a role in donations is a literary paper revealing the patterns between income and donations in the US. In the section titled “Income, Wealth, and Taxes,” Marie Hladká and Vladimír Hyánek convey how individuals with the highest and lowest income rates typically give more than those in between who usually offer 2-3% less⁷. Despite my lack of recognition to apply this to low-income people, my interviews with Grace and Brian—who fall in the high-income category—reveal how these findings align with what donors told me about their specific donations to literacy nonprofits in California. Contrastingly, my interview with Claire also reflected how low-income individuals are prone to giving, either through volunteering time or money.

Altruism is another significant aspect brought up by many of the cited sources I have explored. Altruism is the belief in selfless practices, such as giving, donating, or sharing. Gender, religious practice, and even marital status can affect altruism, a topic I will explore later. Multiple sections of Van Slyke’s paper featured the role of altruism as a critical component in many donations to nonprofit organizations. When describing studies done by various academics, Van Slyke wrote that “psychologists have focused on predictors of individual motivation to give such as altruism, giving because of a sense of community, and having been helped by charitable organizations in the past”⁵.

Ultimately, there are many subsections within personal connection; from knowing a friend involved in the business to personally experiencing the cause, personal connection networks are among the most common motives for discovering why people donate to educational nonprofits.

Mode of Donations: Books, Time, and Money

One of the most exciting and unexpected topics during my interviews was the modes of donation. Before diving deeper into literacy and education nonprofits, I pictured donations as monetary. Even though most donations worldwide are monetary, multiple interviews have revealed that modes of donations through books, resources, and even time are just as significant, if not more impactful towards the organization. In this section of my paper, I will examine the different modes of donations and their impact and significance to donors. Each separate method of donation appeals differently to donors but might not align with the needs of the nonprofit. While physical donations may be utilized better in some, direct monetary donations could be more useful for others.

It is evident to acknowledge one common type of donation, especially when donating to a literacy or education nonprofit: books. Many literacy nonprofits in Silicon Valley commonly desire physical donations such as books for their cause, either from donors or bought by the nonprofit with the donations given. Kristy initially became interested in literacy and education, running a grant foundation for a region within Silicon Valley, where she would read and research about over 30 nonprofits every year to donate to. To meet new people and involve herself in the community, Kristy aimed to give physical donations to the nonprofits she chose to work with. “So [giving books] is pretty easy, as opposed to asking [people] to spend money and having to buy things,” she explained. Along with easiness, as Kristy mentioned, directly giving books cuts the process between donations and purchasing, making it easier for the nonprofit to utilize their donations. In addition to simplifying the process many literacy nonprofits go through with books, Kristy also said that books specifically for kids can increase a positive mindset and help them escape from the world sometimes.

In addition to books as a form of donation, time is one of the most significant donations for many nonprofits. Claire, who began volunteering at LiteracyFun in 2019, explained how volunteering is vital to the nonprofit community. “I didn’t know this initially, but [volunteering] reinforces my commitment and donations, knowing that [CEO] and the team are there for families in a variety of ways I’ve never even thought about,” she said. The idea of reinforcing commitment drew Claire back to the nonprofit. She volunteered her time and encouraged support for the cause, fully aware of the impact on the communities. In addition to reinforcing volunteering, Claire also explained how volunteering appeals to many others in the area. She said, “It feels authentic because volunteering is a core part of our work. It’s community building and money, which is really attractive [to people].” This idea of “community building” was a surprising factor that occurred more than once throughout my interviews.

Like Claire, Mark had been seeking a local volunteer opportunity in the literacy/education department. Once he found a nonprofit to donate to that matched his requirements and interests, he began as a tutor for elementary children learning to read. “I liked the actual volunteer opportunity and opportunity to give my time and effort as opposed to just giving money towards an organization,” he explained. Kristy enjoys interacting and helping the children from the nonprofit, ensuring that her time is used wisely. “The feelings coming away from those tutoring sessions are really positive; you feel like you’re directly impacting one child in a meaningful way.” Unlike how simple monetary or online donations leave the donor somewhat unsatisfied, volunteering uses donors’ time to help the cause first-hand.

Donors see more than just this recognition of time as a donation but also by people who have positions in nonprofits. As CEO of a children’s literacy nonprofit, Sarah has seen the im-

pact of time in her nonprofit. Originally inspired to begin this nonprofit after working in multiple low-income schools, Sarah believed her community needed a change. After launching her organization a few years ago, she started accepting volunteers from local leagues, commonly seeing teenagers come in and help during the weekends. “Most people think of donations as financial contributions. I feel—especially as an organization that uses people quite a bit—I consider time a donation,” she explained. Contrastingly to books, time directly involves donors, not only bringing them closer to what the cause is about but also how the nonprofit works. She said, “We also found that the stepping-stone was through volunteers; they are the people who engage in your organization. They learn more about it, believe in it, and are willing to do it.” Sarah expanded on this: “The way that you can keep donors connected to your organization is by not thinking of them as a paycheck but as a partner in delivering the services, so keeping them engaged in your organization is essential.” Sarah’s thought process reveals how despite the importance of monetary donations, time can also serve as a bond between donors.

Similarly, Claire reinforces this idea when saying how this “connection” draws many people to the nonprofit. “What was always powerful for me was the early founders and other people running the power of the volunteer force. There are many connections in the community, so the fact that so many people wanted to work at [nonprofit] made me want to be a part of it too,” she said. Reiterating the “power of the volunteer force,” Claire’s perspective on how the aspect of timely donations can be attractive showcases the importance of volunteering as a donation in many literacy and education nonprofits.

Expanding on this, Van Slyke stated in their analysis section that “Volunteers should be among the first individuals that nonprofit managers and fund-raisers look to for donations of money”⁵. Sarah’s alignment with donors who prioritize volunteering as their primary mode of donation highlights the integral role that volunteering plays within nonprofits.

Accordingly, volunteering has many benefits that appeal to donors. An article published in the New York Times featured the helpful aspects of volunteering coming personally from a community organization volunteer despite New Yorkers not being “at their strongest.” “That’s one of the best things about volunteering,” he said. “You’re coming to help others and learning; you’re doing this cultural exchange with others. It’s enjoyable when you get to come here, and then you learn beyond yourself,” he said⁸. This perspective of volunteering is a valuable form of donation for donors to learn “beyond themselves” and contribute to the volunteering interest.

Credit, Recognition, and Impact: “Earmarking,” Money Dispersion

Some of the most in-depth and lengthy answers I received were in response to questions regarding how donors feel about the impact of donating their time and money. For some, donations were a quick reciprocation to a friend or to support a cause. For others, it was a thoughtful use of money and time. Adding to the impact, many donors had mixed opinions on the credit or recognition they received before donating and how it affected them. In this section, I will dive deeper into the impact of donations on donors and the recognition they receive from nonprofits in return.

First, it is crucial to recognize how nonprofits commonly reciprocate donors and essentially what is “given back.” As a donor liaison of Happy Reads, Mia has special instructions to follow when managing donor reciprocations. “Here in Silicon Valley, most of our dollars come from corporate partnerships because we are in a place where there’s a lot of corporate corporations and foundations,” she explained. Silicon Valley’s reputation as a wealthy environment contrasts with the nonprofit’s sister program in New York, which is prone to much more individual giving. To thank those who paid a large amount, over 1,000, Mia typically sends a personal call or email, along with the option to showcase their name on the nonprofit’s website. All donations, however, are subject to getting “earmarked,” essentially allowing the donors to choose where their money goes, whether it is a specific school, region, or resource. Earmarking appeals to many donors in the area who wish to see how their money is making a change and, essentially, what they are paying to help. Sarah adds on to the importance of reciprocation to donors. “But more importantly, even if we weren’t required by law, we would [thank donors] because it’s a gift. That’s how we think about it. A gift that supports other families in getting the services that we’re providing,” she said.

Despite having little interest in literacy, Brian reiterates this idea of seeing the impact of his dollars when donating to nonprofits. “I am more interested in understanding how many people I have helped and what the lasting impact was than hearing individual stories about how much somebody’s life has improved,” he explained. Like many other donors, volunteers enjoy seeing the use of their money when spending it on a good cause. Adding to this perspective, Claire said, “For me, it’s really important to know what my money will be used for.” When donating and focusing on children, Lily also reaped the benefits of knowing that she benefits the children with her money. “Just knowing that the money is going to the kids, as well as the passion of the people involved, I believe it’s really effective.” “...that makes a difference in how much I’m willing to give if I believe the money will be used wisely and effectively.” From Sarah’s perspective, donors tend to donate more when they know how the nonprofits will use their money. She said, “[Donors] care about

the story. They don't care about the statistics. They want to feel like they're making a difference". In contrast to Brian's perspective, this idea shows how stories are vital in connecting donors to their donations to continue supporting the organization. Sarah elaborated, "So people are willing to do tangible things because they feel like they know what it's going to be used for." This perspective of knowing where a donor's money is going is not only specific to the donors, between stories and numbers but also to those who work inside the nonprofit. Adding on, Mark recognized his wishes for the nonprofit and his money; "It's important to me that our dollars are making a positive impact when we're donating to an organization that is responsibly putting our dollars to work." Similar to volunteering, donors enjoy viewing their impact on something, whether through money, books, time or even earmarking.

Contrastingly, when debating the responses from donors to nonprofits versus government-sponsored organizations, Estelle James argued that donors who are unaware of the uses of their money within the nonprofit are likely to feel safer and trust the nonprofit more⁹. Although the year of publication (1983) raises a point about whether or not this study is still valid, it is essential to contrast historical motives and current motives. Most of my interviewees' responses opposed this idea. James also discussed the prospect of money usage within the nonprofit. "We have observed that larger donations will increase the organization's output overall, but the activity that the donor had in mind may not be the one that is actually increased"⁹. Conversely to Mia's mention of earmarking and multiple donors' references to seeing their money's impact, this idea of a more significant donation leading to a dispersion of money can reflect the workings of many nonprofits, primarily as they aim to aid each sector of their organization financially. Despite this point not being brought up by either the CEO or donor liaison, the time period, once again, may play a part in how organizations performed compared to today. A less rigorous and established nonprofit system may have taken hold during the 1980s, leading to the nonprofit's inability to follow through with the donor's earmarking request.

An explanation brought up by Tremblay-Boire when discussing self-empowering theories for donations is that donors often gain a positive feeling or "warm glow" after donations¹⁰. Although this paper only briefly touches upon details on this idea being presented in their subjects, Tremblay-Boire theories can parallel the donors' responses when talking about what they take away from their volunteering time or donations to literacy nonprofits. Similarly, a study by James Murphy, a University of Alaska Anchorage professor, found that receiving recognition or thank-yous for donations also increases the donors' want to give, but not the actual donation size¹¹. This can be a clue to how, despite the intensity of the donor's feelings, they ultimately do not parallel the statistics of actual donations.

Accordingly, another factor brought up throughout numerous interviews was how the reputation of the nonprofit affected do-

nations from donors and/or influenced it. In Grace and Brian's case, their acquaintance with the nonprofit heavily influenced its reputation. "So in that sense, the fact that [the nonprofit] had a good reputation with the people who were kind of advocating for it led us to believe it was trustworthy," Brian recalled. Brian's choice to donate to the nonprofit aligned with his trust in his friends advocating for it, evidently making it a suitable nonprofit with a good reputation. Similarly, when speaking about the same situation, Grace said, "I almost never look into an organization's finances. I trust the people I know are donating, or I know their reputation." Contrastingly to Brian, Grace is utterly trustworthy in her friend's choice of nonprofit without worrying about looking into the nonprofit's stance.

Another point important to discuss is the philosophy of effective altruism. Effective altruism encourages individuals to measure the value of giving based on the outcome of the gifts¹². This perception of donation brings up a separate aspect of donations, where outcome plays a role in donation value. For example, Brian might be willing to assess the value of his donation based on the statistical outcomes he aimed to achieve from his initial donation. By doing this, Brian can analyze the significance of his dollars on the nonprofit and decide whether or not to donate again.

A Harvard Department of Psychology study unveiled similar motivations among individuals when selecting a nonprofit for donation. As demonstrated in the study, donors were fond of donating to their favorite nonprofits instead of those backed by research¹³. During a follow-up study focused on types of charities, they once again found that donors did not fixate on the cause of the charity (e.g., global warming, animal care, literacy); instead, their original favoritism for the nonprofit drove them¹³. This is significant to addressing how personal and social connections in nonprofits may triumph over more evidence-based and "urgent" nonprofits in many cases. For example, Grace's lack of fixation on the cause as opposed to Brian directly parallels this.

Discussion: The Unpredictability of the Donor's Mind

Based on the diversity of responses from the interviews, it is necessary to take a step further to find out how this variety of information plays into a conclusion: What factors contribute to donations to literacy and education? As we explored in the previous three sections, some of the most significant factors that affect donations to literacy and education nonprofits are networks of personal connection, modes of donations, and impact and recognition of donations. Through the interviews, various diverse responses were evident, leading to multiple conclusions regarding how each factor plays a role in donations.

As discussed previously, the research location and the inter-

viewees are significant in the paper, as they influenced factors such as demographics, income, and types of donation. Demographics such as those listed are vital for nonprofit organizations to advertise to their donors. For example, as discussed earlier, because women may be inclined to be more philanthropic than men, demographics such as gender can play a role in deciphering the nuanced and complex motivations of donors. In addition to gender, other vital demographics that are influenced by the research location can play a large role in offering background and understanding to donors' preferences.

One key finding I drew from my interviews was how personal connections solidify connections to the nonprofit's mission. Throughout multiple examples in the section Networks of Personal Connection, I discussed topics such as gender, culture, and childhood; these were all factors brought up by the donors when questioned about their connection to the cause of the literacy and education nonprofit organizations. In most situations I asked about, donors could sustain their activity within the nonprofit because they felt a close connection to the cause. For example, Grace's care for female representation in literacy and her culture affected her feelings about GoRead and her decision to donate. Since donating allowed her to deepen her relationship with her culture and advocate for girls' literacy, Grace's bond with the nonprofits that fulfilled these needs sustained her as a donor. When focusing on upbringing and childhood, Lily's experience as a low-income child factored into her relationship with the mission of LiteracyFun similarly, sustaining her affiliation with the nonprofit and its purpose. Personal connections including friends and family relationships may be a predictor of donor preferences on modes of donation but further research is needed to explore this.

Another critical finding from my interviews when discussing Modes of Donation was how donors sought to find communities by donating their time and involving themselves in a purposeful cause. As I touched on in the second section of my paper, many donors found themselves donating their time and money as a result of looking for a way to help out firsthand and make profound connections. For example, Claire and Mark were looking for opportunities within their communities to assist a cause they were interested in. Despite their backgrounds and professions, both built numerous social connections through the nonprofits they volunteered and donated to, not just as donors but as a significant part of a larger community. Building common ground is one of the most important ways to achieve relationships. Because Claire and Mark sought to make a change in their community for the same reason, they formed bonds with the people they worked with, primarily through volunteering in person.

Lastly, another critical discovery I found when discussing credit, reputation, and recognition in donations was that donor's preferences for credit and recognition are not always agreed upon and come in various ways. In the third section of my paper, Credit, Recognition, and Impact, I debriefed the diverse

answers I received from my interviewees, along with similarities, differences, and even how workers at nonprofits view the variety of options when it comes to giving credit to donors for their money and/or time. For example, while Mia explained the popular "earmarking" process, Brian preferred seeing the statistical impact of his dollars on the organization. From the perspective of a CEO, Sarah analyzed how many of the donors at LiteracyFun enjoyed hearing stories about the children they impacted by donating. Although Sarah and Mia's responses do not represent all donor activity, these answers not only showcase how different donors wish to see their money used but also how it challenges nonprofit organizations when managing a variety of accommodations. Challenges when managing a broad range of accommodations may present a struggle for nonprofits to appeal to a wide variety of donors due to their different preferences in recognition and credit from the nonprofit organization.

Revisiting the context of California is significant when discussing these ideas because of the vast differences in schooling, income, and wealth in San Mateo County. As I discussed in the introduction, California has a low literacy rate compared to its counterparts in the West, with around 28.4% of residents being able to read and write professionally¹⁴. Contrasting to California's position as one of the wealthier states in the US, literacy has deemed itself a significant problem in high-income society. When applying California's context to my findings in the previous paragraphs, it is important to note how these results may vary if tested in other areas. These findings reflect the significant aspects of how personal connection, modes of donations, and credit play into donations and how donors use these aspects to build common ground to sustain themselves as donors.

Conclusion

By conducting interviews with eight individuals connected to different literacy and education nonprofits in San Mateo County, diverse perspectives and responses emerged. Reviewing over 20 scholarly articles and popular media sources provided further insights. In "Networks of Personal Connections," it was revealed that personal ties strengthen the bond between donors and their chosen nonprofits. "Modes of Donations" highlighted the role of diverse donation methods in fostering new communities and social ties. Lastly, "Credit, Recognition and Impact" presented various opinions on fund allocation influenced by individual donor preferences.

Future directions for research on literacy nonprofits may benefit from reaching out to a more extensive base of donors, liaisons, and CEOs to gain a more significant amount of input and information about their donations. In addition, increasing the amount of in-depth demographic questions, including an enormous variety of questions about gender, economy, culture, marriage, and income as influential factors, would allow diving deeper into

how these aspects differ in California. Furthermore, reaching out to donors involved in school-based nonprofits and education would be essential to discovering a separate element of literacy donations. To maximize donor activity and donations, nonprofit organizations can utilize the findings of this research to attract a new donor base and retain existing ones. The experiences of the people I spoke with point to how nonprofits should personalize and open up new modes of donations and ways to give credit and recognition to ultimately increase donor activity. Researchers should dive deeper into these topics to deepen the analytical breadth of ideas behind the donor's mind.

About the Author

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