



# Beyond the dollars:

The long-term value of giving days for community foundations

**Knight Foundation Giving Day Initiative**  
**Summary Report**

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# Executive Summary

Since the first giving days in 2009, these short-term online fundraising campaigns—often hosted by community foundations—have taken communities by storm. [The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation](#) (Knight Foundation), which cares deeply about informed and engaged communities and innovations in digital technology, observed with interest the growing trend of community-wide giving days. Recognizing that many community foundations were struggling to embrace digital tools, including social media and online fundraising, Knight Foundation launched a pilot program in 2012 to determine whether giving days would be an effective way for community foundations to experiment with these technologies. What began as a small pilot program evolved into a multifaceted Giving Day Initiative through which Knight Foundation supported 18 giving day organizers to run 49 campaigns.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Campaigns counted as each community foundation's effort to host its own giving day or support a statewide giving day. For example, Wichita's Art Day of Giving is one campaign, as is the Community Foundation of Central Georgia's efforts to support Georgia Gives Day by providing nonprofit capacity building and prizes for nonprofits in the area served by the community foundation.

## Over the four-year period, the initiative:



Raised almost  
**\$116.3 million.**



Engaged  
**367,495 donors,**  
who made more  
than **600,000**  
donations.



Mobilized **20,297**  
organizations  
to participate.

While these topline data points are impressive, the main focus of this report is the ways in which giving days have helped community foundations thrive. The report is tailored toward community foundation giving day organizers, but the lessons are relevant for any organization looking to host a campaign. The evaluations brought to light the numerous ways in which giving days provided long-term value to the community foundations that hosted them:

- **Giving days helped to grow and democratize philanthropy, furthering the mission of many community foundations.**

By heightening awareness and excitement around local causes, they brought in new funding to participating nonprofits and activated a significant number of donors, including those with smaller financial capacity: 36 percent of donors surveyed thought they donated more than they would have had the giving days not occurred.<sup>2</sup>

However, giving days still have a long way to go in attracting a diverse, demographically representative donor base.

- **Giving days increased community foundation visibility and credibility in their communities.**

They helped community foundations communicate their missions and services to larger audiences and establish themselves as valuable to, and trusted by, nonprofits and donors in the areas they serve. Nearly half (*48 percent*) of nonprofits and donors heard about the community foundations for the first time as a result of the giving days.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Post Giving Day Donor Surveys; n=1364; 2014-2015.

<sup>3</sup> Post Giving Day Nonprofit and Donor Surveys; n=5,511; 2013-2015.

- **Giving days strengthened the capacity of community foundations to raise funds and engage a broader set of donors online.**

These campaigns helped them learn how to use digital tools such as social media and online fundraising. Through the campaigns, they were able to find and engage donors online and, to a certain extent, raise funds for their own institutions. Fourteen of the 18 giving day organizers raised money for their own institutions in at least one of their campaigns.

- **Giving days positioned community foundations as hubs of information in their communities.**

From centralizing information about local nonprofits to collecting widespread nonprofit and donor data, the campaigns positioned community foundations as central to a wealth of community information.

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**“Nearly half (48 percent) of nonprofits and donors heard about the community foundations for the first time as a result of the giving days.”**

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To fully realize the long-term value of hosting giving days, community foundations found ways in which to make them cost-effective and mission-aligned. To do this, community foundations:

- **Cut and recuperated costs** by ceasing to cover donation processing fees or by charging a fee or requesting a tip upon checkout.
- **Shared the workload** by training nonprofits to raise their own matching funds and working with strategic partners.

- **Connected giving days to other areas of their work** by encouraging the participation of funds held at the community foundation.

As this report was being finalized, 54 communities participating in the nationwide giving day, Give Local America, experienced a technology failure that disabled the website from processing online donations for many of the 24 hours allotted to the campaigns. This is a reminder of some of the risks inherent in utilizing centralized technology, specifically in the nonprofit sector. While many community foundations grapple with the question of whether they should continue to run giving days, we hope they look to the findings of this report to also see the benefits such campaigns. ■

# Part I. Introduction

**T**he world is changing rapidly. Communities are increasingly online, mobile and diverse. Community foundations, like all organizations, must be able to adapt in order to provide continued value in the 21st century. Online giving days are one vehicle for helping them do so.

Much of what has been written about giving days since they began in 2009 has focused on the financial results of these campaigns, including the question of whether giving days help raise new money for nonprofits or simply shift around the timing of donations. Little attention has been paid to whether and how these campaigns benefit the institutions that run them.

Based on the findings of the [John S. and James L. Knight Foundation's](#) multiyear Giving Day Initiative, this report provides the first in-depth look at the long-term value that giving days can provide to the community foundations that run them. While giving days are not for every community foundation, and are not the only programs these organizations can use to achieve their goals, they nonetheless offer significant value to community foundations that are intentional about pursuing them.

## Giving Day Initiative Overview

Knight Foundation's Giving Day Initiative supported 18 giving day organizers to run 49 giving day campaigns from 2012 to 2015.

Figure 1 ([see page 8](#)) outlines the giving days and organizers included in the initiative.<sup>4</sup>



Blue Grass Community Foundation's Good Giving Challenge.

## The 2016 Tech Failure

The donation platform supporting 54 giving days across the country shut down for much of the day due to numerous technology issues. This failure, which affected many thousands of donors and nonprofits, has sparked a lively conversation about the future of giving days and the state of nonprofit technology. This report does not directly address these issues, but adds to the conversation with a focus on the long-term benefits of giving days—regardless of which platforms are used or how the giving day model may evolve.

For more on developing a “plan B”, see the [Giving Day Playbook](#).

<sup>4</sup> For a complete list of topline results, see Appendix A.

Figure 1. Giving Days and Giving Day Organizers. ▶

GIVING DAY	GIVING DAY ORGANIZER
Art Day of Giving (Art DOG)	Wichita Community Foundation
Centre Gives	Centre Foundation (State College, Pennsylvania)
Colorado Gives Day (CO Gives Day)	Community Foundation Serving Boulder County
FindLearnGive.org Match Day	North Florida Community Foundation
Match Day	
Georgia Gives Day (GA Gives Day)	Community Foundation of Central Georgia
	Community Foundation of the Chattahoochee Valley
Give Grand	Community Foundation of Grand Forks
Give Miami Day	The Miami Foundation
Give to the Max Day (GTMD)	Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation
	GiveMN (St. Paul, Minnesota)
The Giving Challenge	Manatee Community Foundation (Sarasota, Florida)*
Good Giving Guide Challenge	Blue Grass Community Foundation
The Great Give	Community Foundation for Palm Beach and Martin Counties
Lake County Gives	Legacy Foundation
Northwest Indiana Gives (NWI Gives)	
Match Day	
Let's Give Allen County	Community Foundation of Greater Fort Wayne
Midlands Gives	Central Carolina Community Foundation
Mississippi Gives Day	Mississippi Gives
Silicon Valley Gives (SV Gives)	Silicon Valley Community Foundation

\*The Manatee Community Foundation partnered with the Community Foundation of Sarasota County to host The Giving Challenge.

### Giving Day Formats

The term “giving day” is used generically in this report and elsewhere, but in reality giving days are fairly diverse efforts. The giving days included in the initiative exemplify this diversity. Within the group of Knight Foundation grantees, giving days:

- Utilized different time horizons, some spanning a 24-hour period and others multiple weeks or months.
- Employed different participation structures, with some open to any community nonprofit group, some open only to a select group of nonprofits and some open only to nonprofit endowment funds held by the community foundations.
- Covered different-sized geographic areas and populations, with some focusing on small rural communities, some on large metro regions, and some on entire states.
- Engaged communities with vastly different levels of wealth.

Figure 2. Topline Data<sup>5</sup> ▶

### Most giving day campaigns raised less than \$1 million



### ...from more than 2,000 donors...



### ...for more than 100 organizations.



<sup>5</sup> Each graphic includes all giving day campaigns for which there are data. n=number of giving days.

## Learning and Evaluation

The Giving Day Initiative began with a pilot program in 2012 that provided grants to eight community foundations for their giving days. After the pilot, in which each community foundation was dealing with similar questions and duplicating efforts in a variety of ways, Knight Foundation recognized the opportunity for community foundations to share resources and learn from one another to create effective giving days. In response Knight Foundation launched the [Giving Day Playbook](#), an online how-to guide for community foundations to run giving days, and the [Peer Learning Exchange](#), a community that convened online and via conference call to share lessons learned, discuss challenges and ask questions about giving days across communities.<sup>6</sup>

The Playbook and Peer Learning Exchange model created a process of continuous peer learning over the course of the initiative. As community foundations planned and executed their giving days, lessons learned and best practices were captured in biannual evaluations of the initiative conducted by [Third Plateau Social Impact Strategies](#), shared online through the Giving Day Playbook, and discussed among giving day organizers in the Peer Learning Exchange.<sup>7</sup>

6 For more information on the Peer Learning Exchange, see Appendix B.

7 For a full description of evaluation methodology, see Appendix C.



“The first digital learning platform for Knight Foundation best exemplifies the hunger and capacity grantees have to learn from each other and network in a very intentional and subject-driven way and revealed a new way for Knight Foundation to work with grantees.”

—Bahia Ramos,  
*Arts Program Director, Knight Foundation*

# Part II. Giving Day Initiative Evaluation

**T**he evaluations of the Giving Day Initiative examined more than topline financial performance, exploring the ways in which giving days benefited the community foundations that ran them. From the months of planning, outreach and capacity building leading up to the campaigns to the data collection, partnerships and community initiatives that followed, the hard work that community foundations invested in giving days seems to have paid off. The campaigns furthered community foundations' missions, increased their public profiles, strengthened their capacity to fundraise and engage donors online, and positioned them as hubs of information in their communities.

## **1. Giving days grew and democratized philanthropy in the participating communities, furthering the missions of many community foundations.**

Without baseline data about philanthropy in each community, it is difficult to measure the isolated effect of a giving day on larger philanthropic trends. However, data collected over the course of the initiative demonstrate the ability of the campaigns to cultivate excitement about community philanthropy. This led to growth in philanthropy by bringing in more funding to participating nonprofits and the democratization of philanthropy by

activating a significant number of donors, including those with smaller financial capacity. Initiative evaluations found the following:

### **Many participating nonprofits bring in new money through the giving days.**

Every year of the initiative, participating nonprofits indicated that they brought in new funding through the giving days that they would not have raised otherwise. On average, 57 percent of nonprofits surveyed across the initiative stated that they brought in such funding.<sup>8</sup>

### **Many giving day donors contribute more money to nonprofits than they would have without the campaigns.**

Giving days get communities excited about philanthropy. Some 36 percent of donors surveyed thought they donated more than they would have had the giving days not occurred.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Data from Chattahoochee Valley, GiveMN, Miami, Silicon Valley and Wichita; Post Giving Day Nonprofit Survey; n=984; 2014-2015.

<sup>9</sup> Data from giving day donor surveys for Legacy, Miami, Mississippi Gives, Silicon Valley and Wichita; Post Giving Day Donor Survey; n=1,634; 2014-2015.

### **Some giving day communities experience an increase in philanthropy and philanthropists as a result of the campaigns.**

After Give Miami Day in 2014, participants from 70 percent of nonprofits surveyed said they believed that the giving day increased year-round philanthropy in the city.<sup>10</sup> In Minnesota during Give to the Max Day in 2014 and 2015, at least 545 donors made charitable contributions for the first time in their lives.

### **Giving days demonstrate the value of low-dollar donations.**

Democratizing philanthropy requires activating a significant number of donors, including those with more limited financial capacity. In large part because the “entry point” for giving day participation was so low (minimum donations ranged from \$10 to \$25), these campaigns were primarily composed of smaller-dollar contributions.

In all but one giving day season, the median donation was around \$50, illustrating that there were just as many contributions of less than \$50 as more than \$50.

Considering the millions of dollars raised through the giving days, the \$50 median donation amount demonstrates the remarkable power of these campaigns to generate significant funding through small contributions—democratization in action.

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<sup>10</sup> Post Giving Day Nonprofit Survey; n=56; 2014

### **Giving days bring people together.**

In an increasingly dispersed, mobile world, giving days united people around issues, places, or common goals. Giving days made supporting nonprofits public, fun and social, spurring excitement around small-dollar philanthropy that was accessible to most community members.

In 2016, the Sacramento Region Community Foundation’s Big Day of Giving was hard to miss, with events throughout the day that included a kickoff party, a “halftime” celebration with food trucks and live music, and an evening celebration.<sup>11</sup>

Jake Blumberg, executive director of GiveMN, noted that Give to the Max Day has become a holiday throughout the state of Minnesota. Blumberg views the campaign as not just the flagship program of GiveMN, but an event that belongs to all of the participating nonprofits and donors.

### **However, giving days struggle to be demographically representative of their communities.**

Giving days did not attract a diverse, demographically representative donor base. Women, individuals identifying as white or Caucasian, English speakers, people with a

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<sup>11</sup> While not a Knight Foundation grantee, the Sacramento Region Community Foundation was an active participant in the Peer Learning Exchange and has been a leading voice amongst community foundations hosting giving days.

higher education and those over the age of 40 were consistently overrepresented in the campaigns.<sup>12</sup>

### A Focus on Diversity

While 66 percent of Miami-Dade County is Hispanic/Latino, on Give Miami Day 2015 this demographic represented only 21% of donors. Meanwhile, 69% of donors were female, while only 51% of people in the county are women. While the percentage of donors who identified as Hispanics/Latinos increased by 3 percent in comparison to 2014, showing progress toward representing the community at large, the percentage of women increased by 2 percent, a step away from giving day donors being representative of the areas in which they live.

Demographic data from [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)

The only demographic that was specifically targeted by community foundations in any of the giving days was donors under the age of 40, but the 65 and older age group was still overrepresented. Legacy Foundation targeted young donors for Match Day, which restricted giving day participation to endowment fundraising. Erica Fizer, program officer at the foundation, attributes the overrepresentation of donors over 65 in part to the familiarity of that age group with planned gifts and endowment building.

<sup>12</sup> According to donor survey data from Duluth Superior Area, GiveMN, Legacy, Miami, Mississippi Gives, North Florida, Silicon Valley and Wichita in 2014 and 2015. Note that some differences between giving day demographics and geographic demographics may result from the participation of giving day donors who do not reside in the areas in which the giving days occur.

## 2. Giving days increased community foundation visibility and credibility in their communities.

For community foundations to ensure their institutional sustainability, they must be seen as important players in their communities. Giving days raised the profiles of community foundations in their communities, helping them communicate their missions and services to larger audiences and establish themselves as valuable to, and trusted by, nonprofits and donors in the areas they serve. Initiative evaluations found the following:

### Many nonprofits and donors discover community foundations because of giving days.

Giving days are very public campaigns. Community foundations, nonprofits and donors all promoted the campaigns through email, social media, radio, newspaper, television, billboards and other means of communication. This widespread publicity brought unprecedented attention to community foundations, as the hosts of the giving days. Among nonprofits and donors surveyed throughout the initiative, 49 percent and 15 percent, respectively, heard about the community foundations for the first time as a result of the giving days (see Figure 3).<sup>13</sup>

### Careful Planning for Giving Days

Running an online campaign that relies on a single platform for a short period of time involves some inherent risk. Giving day organizers should expect and plan ahead for technology glitches—possibly even major failures. In the case of a full website shutdown, some giving day organizers extended the length of their campaigns, accepted donations over the phone, and encouraged donors to give directly to nonprofits outside of the giving day websites.

Check out the [Crisis Planning](#) and [Crisis Management and Communications](#) sections of the Giving Day Playbook for more detailed information on how to plan for and react to a crisis.

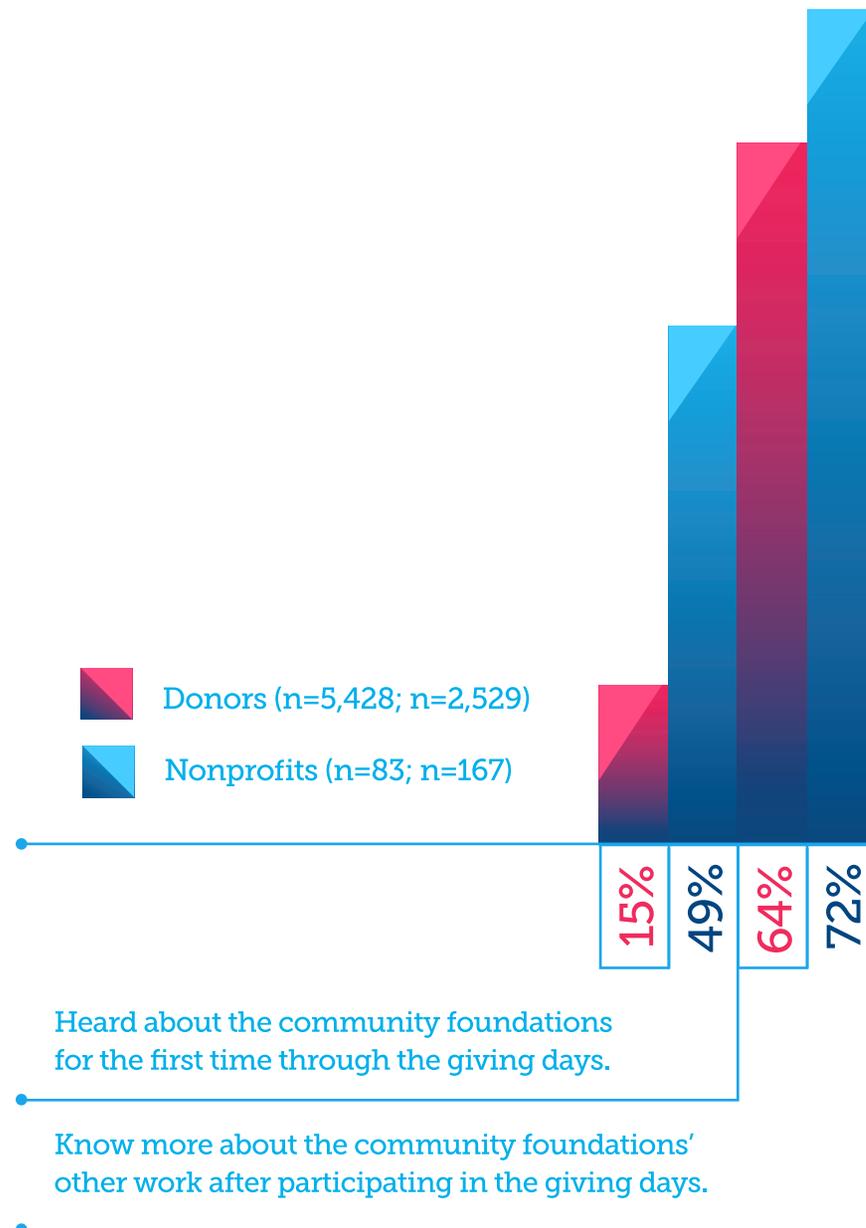
<sup>13</sup> Includes nonprofit and donor survey data from Blue Grass, Central Carolina, Duluth Superior Area, Legacy, Miami, North Florida, Silicon Valley and Wichita; Post Giving Day Nonprofit and Donor Survey; n=5,511; 2013-2015.

Many nonprofits and donors learn about the community foundations' other services through the giving days. In addition to simply becoming aware of the community foundations' existence through the campaigns, giving day participants learned about the many other services offered by community foundations. Over the course of the initiative, 72 percent of nonprofits and 64 percent of donors reported knowing more about the community foundations after participating in the campaigns (see Figure 3).<sup>14</sup>

**Giving days help community foundations establish credibility with nonprofit and donor participants.**

In post-giving day surveys, almost all nonprofit and donor participants said they viewed the community foundations as both trusted and valuable institutions in their communities.

Figure 3. Indicators of Community Foundation Visibility



<sup>14</sup> Includes nonprofit and donor survey data from Central Carolina, Legacy, Miami, Silicon Valley and Wichita. Post Giving Day Nonprofit Survey; n=167; 2013-2015; Post Giving Day Donor Survey; n=2,529; 2013-2015.

Some 96 percent of nonprofits and 86 percent of donors viewed the community foundations as valuable,<sup>15</sup> while 94 percent of nonprofits and 84 percent of donors viewed them as trusted (see Figure 4).<sup>16</sup>

Many nonprofit participants and donors also expressed interest in working with the community foundations outside of the giving days, with 51 percent of nonprofit participants and 43 percent of donors reporting that they would be interested in doing so.<sup>17</sup>

### Giving days secure new clients and supporters for community foundations.

Community foundations brought in new clients and supporters through giving days by strategically targeting certain giving day donors to open donor-advised funds (DAFs), providing incentives to nonprofits to open endowment funds, and encouraging local foundations and corporations to sponsor the campaigns.

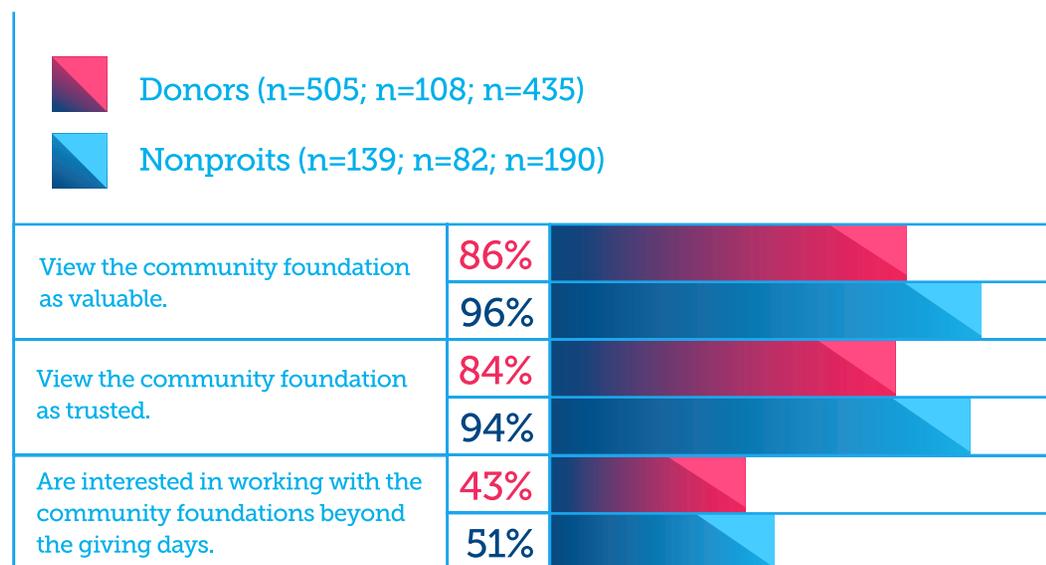
Ten community foundations enabled nonprofits to raise money for endowment funds through their giving days, and some even restricted campaign participation to endowment fundraising.

<sup>15</sup> Includes nonprofit survey data from Central Carolina, Miami, and Wichita and donor survey data from Legacy, Miami, and Wichita. Post Giving Day Nonprofit Survey; n=139; 2014-2015. Post Giving Day Donor Survey; n=505; 2014-2015.

<sup>16</sup> Includes nonprofit survey data from Central Carolina and Wichita and donor survey data from Legacy and Wichita. Post Giving Day Nonprofit Survey; n=82; 2015. Post Giving Day Donor Survey; n=108; 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Includes nonprofit survey data from Boulder County and Miami and donor survey data from Legacy and Miami. Post Giving Day Nonprofit Survey; n=190; 2014-2015. Post Giving Day Donor Survey; n=435; 2014-2015.

Figure 4. Indicators of Community Foundation Credibility, 2013-2015. ▶



Blue Grass Community Foundation, for instance, offered exclusive prizes and matches for nonprofits creating and building endowment funds and considers the Good Giving Guide Challenge to be an integral piece of its overarching strategy to build endowments. In 2015, six new nonprofit endowment funds were opened as a direct result of the campaign.

Community foundations found the giving days to be a useful and exciting opportunity to engage fund holders. Thirteen community foundations enabled DAFs to donate through their giving days, resulting in 592 DAFs donating \$3,556,129 to participating nonprofits.

The Miami Foundation encouraged individuals planning to make large donations on Give Miami Day to open a fund at the foundation to avoid incurring the donation processing fees. As a result, through its 2015 giving day the community foundation

## Measuring Campaign Success

The success of each giving day depends on its goals. While campaigns that focused on building nonprofit endowments tended to raise less money and reach fewer donors than giving days that were open to the wider nonprofit community, the community foundations that ran them received more direct benefits through the growth of their assets under management.

This highlights an important tension between raising the most money and engaging the most donors as possible through giving days and bringing direct benefits to the community foundations (rather than having them act as pass-through organizations). The definition of success in these areas depends on the goals the campaigns are aiming to achieve.

opened nine new DAFs and started conversations with other major donors about how the community foundation might help them to devise and execute their philanthropic strategies.

The Silicon Valley Community Foundation used Silicon Valley Gives as an opportunity to reach out to local corporations, asking them to sponsor the giving day in general as well as more specific nonprofit endowment funds. It used the campaign as a conversation starter to tell local corporations about its services in the community and potential partnership opportunities beyond the giving day itself.

## 3. Giving days strengthened the capacity of community foundations to fundraise and engage a broader set of donors online.

From partnering with donation platform providers to training nonprofits how to successfully raise funds online, giving day organizers had to strengthen their digital skills to host giving days. By encouraging community foundations to interact online more than they do at any other time of year, giving days transformed the way they utilize online tools. Initiative evaluations found the following:

### Giving days increase community foundations' online presence.

Community foundations' website traffic and Twitter followers grew significantly around the giving days (see Figure 5). For instance, during the fall 2015 campaigns, community foundations' websites had nine times as many visits as the daily average throughout the year.

In addition, community foundations experienced a 12 percent increase in Twitter followers from two months before the campaigns to one month after.<sup>18</sup>

Figure 5. Giving Day Organizers' Website Traffic

**Giving day organizers had nine times as much website traffic during the campaigns.**

Average number of visits to organizers' website per day in the past year	819
Total visits to organizers' websites on giving day	7,336

<sup>18</sup> Twitter follower data for Boulder County, Legacy, Miami, Blue Grass, GiveMN, and Duluth Superior Area collected two months before the campaigns and one month after.

**Most giving day organizers raise money for themselves through the campaigns, though this is never their main focus.**

Fourteen of the 18 giving day organizers raised money for their own institutions in at least one campaign. This took a variety of forms, including giving day organizers fundraising directly for general operating support, providing donors the option to add a tip to their giving day donations, charging a participation fee to nonprofits, securing corporate sponsorships, or raising money exclusively for a single fund at the foundation. However, from 2013 to 2015, giving day organizers raised a combined \$880,268—just 0.8 percent of the total amount raised through the campaigns, illustrating that giving days were never primarily about the organizers raising money for themselves.

The amount raised by each giving day organizer was likely a function of the size of the campaigns, the effort giving day hosts put into raising money for their own institutions, and the extent to which bringing in money for the community foundations was embedded into the campaigns (as through charging a participation fee or offering a tipping option).

The amount raised also varied significantly, from nothing by those that did not want to compete with nonprofits for donor dollars or attention, to more than \$200,000 by charging a participation fee to help defray the costs of growing campaigns. For more on how giving day organizers recuperated costs associated with giving days, see the Giving Day Sustainability section of this report.

**Community foundations engage donors online through giving days.**

Community foundations used email and social media to communicate with nonprofits and donors about the giving days. Many community foundations reported that hosting a giving day transformed the way they use social media and was a catalyst for getting them to be more active on Facebook and Twitter.

The Community Foundation Serving Boulder County had 400 million impressions in Boulder County as a result of its digital advertising for Colorado Gives Day.

**4. Giving days positioned community foundations as hubs of information in their communities.**

As community foundations stepped up to organize giving days, their role as centers of information in their communities became even more apparent. Among other things, they gathered nonprofit information in a single online location, became leaders of nonprofit capacity-building efforts, and were the beneficiaries of a wealth of community data generated through the campaigns. Initiative evaluations found the following:

## Giving days enable community foundations to centralize information about local nonprofits.

For organizations to participate in a giving day, they had to create online profiles for donors to view. The process of creating giving day profiles pushed nonprofits to articulate their missions, and in some cases, provide much more detailed information about their budgets, boards and even impact. Many community foundations enabled and encouraged nonprofits to utilize the online profiles and donation processing on the giving day platforms throughout the year.

### Digital Skills

Community foundations are “learning by doing” how best to engage donors online. For example, the Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation staff learned to use social media not only to ask for donations, but also to update current and potential donors with events, milestones and impact over the course of the year.

For The Miami Foundation, what started as the giving day website is now a year-round resource for the community that provides information for nonprofits and donors in a centralized database.

## Giving days offer community foundations a chance to serve as nonprofit capacity builders.

Trainings are a central component of giving day organizers' responsibilities and provided community foundations a chance to teach nonprofits important new skills. To build the capacity of nonprofits for the giving days and beyond, community foundations ran trainings on topics such as online fundraising, communications and branding, major donor cultivation and donor retention. The Sacramento Region Community Foundation had a sophisticated training series for its Big Day of Giving. The “Boot Camp” series included sessions on building a GivingEdge profile, maximizing social media, engaging nonprofit donors and boards, and developing an eight-week work plan for the campaign. Post-event surveys in 2015 found that these trainings paid off, as nonprofits whose representatives attended all four sessions of the series raised 100 percent more than those that did not.<sup>19</sup>

## Giving days collect data.

The power of big data to improve programs and accelerate social impact is becoming increasingly apparent. Giving days enabled communities to collect large amounts of data from participating nonprofits and donors, which they can utilize to inform programs and ideas to improve their communities. In Miami, the community foundation is creating a map of the nonprofits and donors that participated in Give Miami Day in 2015. Community foundation staff have said that this will give them a firm understanding of where nonprofits and donors come from and enable them to identify gaps in services and more strategically engage specific neighborhoods. Going a step further, technology expert Amy Webb, speaking at Knight Foundation's 2016 Media Learning Seminar, argued that community foundations have the potential to use data not just to map current community needs, but to predict them.

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<sup>19</sup> While not a Knight Foundation grantee, the Sacramento Region Community Foundation was an active participant in the Peer Learning Exchange and has been a leading voice amongst community foundations hosting giving days.

# Part III. Giving Day Sustainability

Over the past few years, giving days have gained traction in the social sector for their power to engage communities around philanthropic causes. As community foundations have stepped up to organize these place-based campaigns, they have been faced with the tension of producing a giving day that is useful to nonprofits and engaging for donors while also being cost-effective and mission-aligned—or, in other words, sustainable—for their own institutions. Despite the benefits of giving days, they will be sustainable for community foundations only if they are intentionally structured as such. Here are some of the ways in which community foundations in the Giving Day Initiative made their giving days more sustainable:

## 1. Community foundations found ways to cut and recuperate costs.

Community foundations shifted from covering online donation processing fees in the first couple of years of their giving days to passing them on to nonprofits and donors by deducting the charges from total earnings or

adding an option for donors to cover the fees associated with their donations upon checkout.

A critical piece of transitioning fees was a movement toward increased communication about the true cost of fundraising (which increases when bringing in new donors) and the significant investment incurred by the community foundations to host giving days. Susie Bowie from the Community Foundation of Sarasota County noted that covering donation-processing fees perpetuates the myth that fundraising is free. When communicating the 6 percent donation processing fee for its Giving Challenge, foundation staff reiterated the cost of bringing in new donors for nonprofits and the reality that the community foundation operates the campaign at a loss.

Some community foundations charged nonprofits to participate or gave donors the option to add a tip for the giving day organizer to their donation. Blue Grass Community Foundation, for example, charged a one-time participation fee of \$500 to offset the cost of publishing the Good Giving Guide distributed through its campaign. The Sacramento Region Community Foundation used a tiered fee structure based on nonprofit budget size for its 2015 Big Day of Giving.

## **2. Community foundations found ways to share the workload.**

As giving days grew in popularity, organizers created community partnerships both to offset costs and staff time and to provide access to a larger network of potential nonprofit and donor participants. Community foundations found partners in other community foundations, United Ways, corporations, professional groups, and increasingly the nonprofit participants themselves. For example, the United Way of Palm Beach County served as the fiscal agent for the Community Foundation of Palm Beach and Martin County's Great Give, which relieved the community foundation of the accounting component of the campaign.

In addition, many community foundations have shifted pre-giving day fundraising to nonprofit participants by training and encouraging them to raise their own matches and secure donors in advance. Give to the Max Day no longer offers a campaign-wide match; instead, the two sponsoring organizations train and rely on nonprofits to raise their own matching funds. The Wichita Community Foundation experimented with a Champion Model, which urged nonprofits to find donors ("champions") with a minimum pledge of \$1,000. They found that this approach allowed nonprofits to have more ownership over their fundraising efforts and enabled the community foundation to process the pledged donations in advance, resulting in less work on the day of the campaign.

## **3. Community foundations connected giving days to other areas of their work.**

Giving days should not operate in a vacuum, and community foundations increasingly tied the campaigns to their other strategic initiatives. For example, the Community Foundation of Grand Forks used its giving day in 2014 as part of an existing effort to engage the community around two issues (homelessness and limited access to health care) and two opportunities (adventure and public arts).

Additionally, as noted throughout, community foundations used giving days as a tool to attract, retain and grow donor-advised funds and nonprofit endowment funds, not only as a revenue stream but also to build long-lasting relationships among the community foundation, donors and nonprofits. Through the giving days, they were able to strategically market their donor and nonprofit services using targeted outreach and prize and fee incentives.

# Part IV. Conclusion

**K**night Foundation's Giving Day Initiative demonstrated that while the money raised on giving days is important, there is much more to these campaigns than the dollars. Giving days have the ability to provide significant long-term value to community foundations.

Giving days led to the democratization of philanthropy in giving day communities, brought new levels of visibility and credibility to community foundations, increased community foundation capacity to fundraise and engage donors online, and positioned community foundations as hubs of information in their communities. Hosting giving days has also required community foundations to get online and begin adapting to the digital age, perhaps more so than any other programs they run.

Of course, giving days are not for every community foundation. Some in the Giving Day Initiative—particularly those that ran their campaigns as part of a statewide giving day—have already stopped running giving days, while others weigh the costs and benefits of the campaigns each year. Undoubtedly, as a result of the Give Local America 2016 technology failure, an active debate is taking place about the future of the giving day

model and many more community foundations will be on the fence about these programs.

These challenges should not obscure the fact that these campaigns can benefit the community foundations in a variety of ways if the organizers are purposeful about how to structure them. A number of community foundations in the Giving Day Initiative have already enjoyed these benefits and are embracing giving days as a central element of their work.

Regardless of whether they continue far into the future or fade in the coming years, giving days have helped inspire community foundations to think differently about their work in the 21st century. There is no going back now.

# Appendices

## Appendix A. Giving Day Initiative Giving Days, Organizers and Topline Results

Figure 6. Giving Day Initiative Giving Days, Organizers and Topline Results

 Giving Day Organizer	 Giving Day	 Duration	 Structure	 Year(s)	Amount Raised	Number of Donors	Number of Nonprofits
Wichita Community Foundation	Art Day of Giving (Art DOG)	24 hours	Stand-alone for arts organizations only	2014-2015	\$1,816,994	2,572	93
Centre Foundation	Centre Gives	36 hours	Stand-alone (Give Local America participant)	2014-2015	\$1,567,669	5,188	207
Community Foundation Serving Boulder County	Colorado Gives Day (CO Gives Day)	24 hours	Regional partner for statewide giving day	2013-2015	\$7,559,205	15,215	576
Community Foundation of Central Georgia	Gerogia Gives Day (GA Gives Day)	24 hours	Regional partners for statewide giving day	2012-2015	\$1,082,519	4,390	407
Community Foundation of the Chattahoochee Valley					\$1,700,433	3,648	305
Community Foundation of Grand Forks	Give Grand	1 week	Stand-alone for four organizations working on two issues and two opportunities in the community	2014	\$445,135	No Data	4
The Miami Foundation	Give Miami Day	24 hours	Stand-alone	2013-2015	\$17,259,339	38,008	1,772
Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation	Give to the Max Day (GTMD)	24 hours	Regional partners for statewide giving day	2013-2015	\$252,666	186	21
GiveMN (St. Paul)					\$40,745,401	177,728	11,957
Blue Grass Community Foundation	Good Giving Guide Challenge	6 weeks, 8 weeks	Stand-alone multiweek campaign with focus on endowments	2012-2015	\$5,620,174	12,895	446

Legacy Foundation	Lake County Gives	6 weeks	Six-week match program for nonprofit organizations that hold endowment funds at the foundation	2012-2013	\$160,532	189	114
	Northwest Indiana Gives (NWI Gives)	24 hours	Partnership with Lake Area United Way to cover three county region	2014	\$157,549	828	42
	Match Day	24 hours	Stand-alone giving day for endowment funds held at the community foundation	2015	\$76,448	170	18
Communtiy Foundation of Greater Fort Wayne	Let's Give Allen County	12 hours	Stand-alone (Give Local America) match day for five organizations chosen by Young Leaders of Northeast Indiana Fund at community foundation	2014	\$127,152	No Data	5
North Florida Community Foundation	FindLearnGive.org Match Day	12 hours, 24 hours	Stand-alone	2013	\$348,626	955	120
	Match Day	24 hours	Stand-alone giving day for endowment funds held at the community foundation	2015	\$263,553	510	53
Central Carolina Community Foundation	Midlands Gives	24 hours	Stand-alone	2014-2015	\$2,621,714	11,596	403
Mississippi Gives	Mississippi Gives Day	24 hours	Stand-alone	2014	\$27,564	No Data	34
Silicon Valley Community Foundation	Silicon Valley Gives (SV Gives)	24 hours	Stand-alone	2014-2015	\$19,027,302	31,989	1418
Manatee Community Foundation	The Giving Challenge	36 hours	Regional partner with Community Foundation of Sarasota County	2014-2015	\$10,009,996	45,841	848
Community Foundation for Palm Beach and Martin Counties	The Great Give	24 hours	Stand-alone (Give Local America Participant)	2014-2015	\$5,403,691	15,587	750

## Appendix B. Lessons from the Peer Learning Exchange (by Author and Consultant Beth Kanter)

To facilitate learning during the initiative, Knight Foundation created and updated the [Giving Day Playbook](#), an online resource with case studies and best practices for how to run an effective giving day, and the [Peer Learning Exchange](#), a group of community foundation staff that convened online and in monthly calls to share lessons learned, discuss challenges and ask questions about hosting giving days across communities.<sup>20</sup> The Knight Foundation Giving Day Peer Learning Exchange launched in 2013 with a cohort of Knight Foundation Community Partners that received funding to implement a giving day from 2013 to 2016 with the following goals:

- **Purposeful Peer Support and Learning:**

Community foundation partners will learn from each other's experiences in implementing the giving day model and using and adapting the resources in the Playbook.

- **Refine Best Practices for Managing Giving Days:**

Community foundation partners will learn and refine the best practices for managing giving

days, including: deliberate use of planning, partner and donor engagement, social media and media integration, flawless logistics and use of giving day platforms, and learning from data.

- **Intentional Learning from Giving Days Data:**

Community foundation partners will use their data to track changes in donor engagement, networks, communications and fundraising to learn how to improve their practice effectively.

The cohort also included several leading organizations whose experiences or strategies enabled them to find better solutions to a problem than their peers, despite facing similar challenges. Participants in such organizations were recruited to share their knowledge.

The Peer Learning Exchange structure consisted of the following components:

- **Giving Day Playbook:**

The “textbook” that documented existing practices in the field all accessible in one location online and served as an essential foundation for the PLE participants to get up to speed quickly on the mechanics of planning and hosting a giving day.

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<sup>20</sup> See Insert 1. Peer Learning Exchange on page 21.

- **Conference Calls:**

Knight Foundation community foundation partners shared mini-case studies about how they used the tools and resources in the Playbook and what worked, what could improved to get better results in their giving days. The calls were facilitated.

- **Private Facebook Group:**

A private online space for “just-in-time” conversations and to extend the conversations taking place in between the calls.

- **Knowledge Capture:**

Practices, tips and resources, shared on the monthly calls were curated and codified and added to a wiki then subsequently incorporated into the Playbook.

## Intentional Peer Learning

Peer Learning Exchange participants appreciated having a network of peers who have a deep understanding of the landscape and what they are all trying to achieve through giving days—particularly those who are from small staffs and work solo in their departments. Everyone reported benefiting from the case studies model and learning from other foundations about what worked and did not.

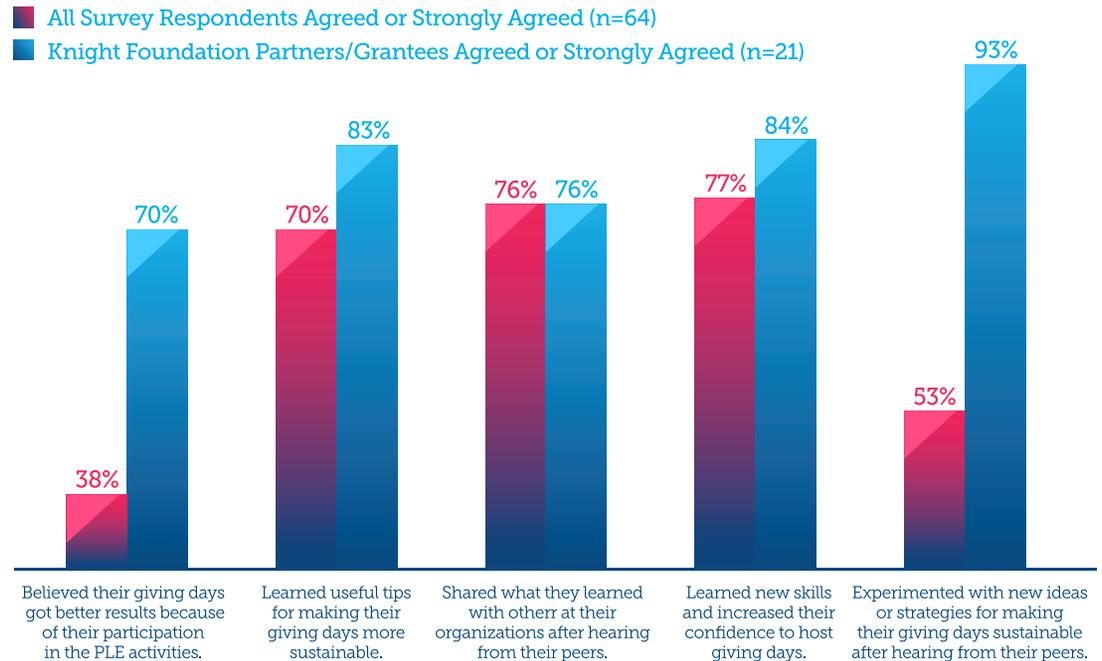
Knight Foundation community foundation partners experimented with new ideas and strategies for making

their giving days sustainable after hearing from their peers compared to all survey participants. Ideas for sustainability were a regular theme on the conference calls and perhaps having the reinforcement from peers in an intimate learning setting gave them the confidence to take some risks in trying something new. Figure 7 reports results of a post-PLE survey.

Figure 7. 2015 Peer Learning Exchange Survey Results ▶

## Survey Question

**Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**



## Appendix C. Evaluation Methodology

**T**hird Plateau Social Impact Strategies (Third Plateau) used a mixed method research design that followed community foundations throughout the giving day process.

The research entailed Third Plateau:

- Surveying community foundations on key metrics related to Knight Foundation goals, topline data and sustainability.
- Reviewing responses from donor and nonprofit surveys distributed by the community foundations.
- Analyzing giving day data collected by the community foundations.
- Conducting phone interviews with lead giving day staff from each campaign organizer as well as external stakeholders.
- Participating in the Peer Learning Exchange before, during and after the implementation of giving days.
- Conducting sustainability coaching sessions with 13 community foundations and one statewide backbone organization to learn about giving day organizers' approach to developing sustainable giving days and share sustainability recommendations identified through Knight Foundation's giving day evaluation with giving day organizers.

- Researching major publications on giving days and community foundations.

Third Plateau developed key metrics for the analysis of initiative goals, topline data, and giving day sustainability for community foundations. Data were collected directly from giving day organizers as well as from nonprofit and donor participants through post-campaign surveys.

Due to the diversity of the giving days and distributed nature of the data collection process (that is, community foundations making independent decisions about which data to collect and whether to collect them at all), the quantity of data collected for each metric varied. Data included in the analysis are from communities that surveyed nonprofits and donors for the relevant information and shared the data with Third Plateau.