



# Charitable Giving

**in the media**

## Detailed Findings

By Erica L. Rosenthal, Ph.D.; Adam Amel Rogers, M.C.M.; Emily B. Peterson, Ph.D.

**Supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation**

This report provides in-depth findings from the USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center's research on charitable giving in mass media. It is a supplement to the official report, which provides a streamlined look at the key findings.

---

---

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHARITABLE GIVING SURVEY

03

Introduction  
Charitable Giving Attitudes and Behavior

---

## CHARITABLE GIVING ON TV

20

Introduction  
Charitable Giving by Genre  
Charitable Giving by Topic

---

## CHARITABLE GIVING IN SCRIPTED ENTERTAINMENT

27

Introduction  
Overview of Giving Entertainment  
How is the Act of Giving Portrayed?  
Are Charitable Organizations Corrupt?  
Is Charity Only for the Rich and Famous?  
Donor and Beneficiary Characteristics

---



# ■ CHARITABLE GIVING SURVEY



## NON-GIVERS

Did not give to any charitable organization



## PLANNED GIVERS

Made donations ahead of time



## RESPONSIVE GIVERS

Made donations in response to a sudden need

## INTRODUCTION

To understand the relationships between Americans' charitable giving attitudes and behaviors and their news and entertainment preferences, we conducted a survey at two time points, both approximating a nationally-representative sample. Data for the first wave were collected in April 2020 and included a total of 2,584 participants.

Originally intended to be a single survey, we added a second wave in July to August to capture additional data as the COVID-19 pandemic raged on, along with a national reckoning around racial discrimination. We recruited a new sample of 2,505 participants for the second wave; the same participants were not surveyed twice. In the second wave, we supplemented general charitable giving questions with items specific to COVID-19, such as where and how often they got their news about the virus, and their beliefs about it. Additional questions were included to better capture attitudes and giving behaviors in relation to racial discrimination. Finally, we expanded the questions about participants' entertainment and leisure habits to include video games, sports, podcasts, and music. We controlled for demographic differences between the two survey waves, including sex and race/ethnicity, in all analyses that compared the waves.

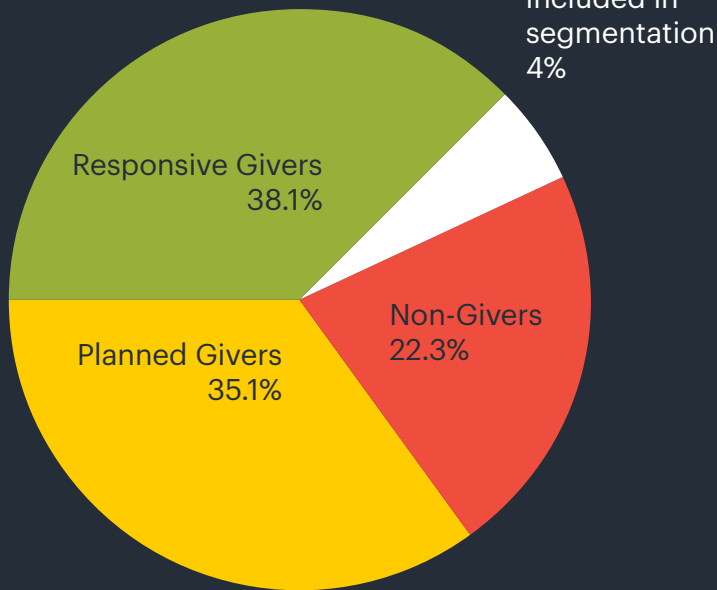
Based on their self-reported 2019 giving, we segmented participants across both survey waves into three groups. Those who did not give any money to charitable organizations in 2019 were designated as **Non-Givers**. Participants who had given at least \$1 in 2019 were further divided into two groups: **Planned Givers** — those who said most of their giving was "through donations that I plan ahead of time, such as recurring monthly donations to a charitable organization," and **Responsive Givers** — those who said most of their giving was "in response to a sudden need (such as a natural disaster), or because a friend or family member asked me to donate to a specific cause."

# CHARITABLE GIVING ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR

## 2019 GIVING BEHAVIOR

In 2019, both Planned Givers and Responsive Givers researched and donated to charitable causes. The causes and methods by which they gave back differed — Planned Givers were the most likely to donate to religious organizations and to organizations while Responsive Givers were the most likely to give directly to individuals and to disaster relief. While Non-Givers didn't donate any money in 2019, they sometimes gave back in non-monetary ways, such as volunteering.

### GIVING GROUPS



**Americans most often gave money directly to an organization, though they also gave back in other ways.**

- Both Planned Givers and Responsive Givers were most likely to give money directly to a charitable organization (54%) or to donate through a purchase (46%). A third of Planned Givers volunteered their time to an organization, compared to about a quarter of Responsive Givers (24%) and few Non-Givers (10%).
- While Non-Givers by definition did not give money in 2019, they occasionally took other charitable actions. One-in-five Non-Givers made a non-monetary donation, such as donating clothing to Goodwill and one in ten shared information about an organization.

**Planned Givers were more likely than others to give through tithing and non-monetary donations in 2019, while Responsive Givers more often gave directly to an individual in need.**

- Responsive Givers were more likely to give directly to a specific person in need such as a direct cash donation or a personal GoFundMe campaign (40%), relative to Planned Givers (28%).
- In contrast, Planned Givers were more likely to give through tithing (36%) than Responsive Givers (19%).

**Animal care and human services were important causes to all groups. On other causes, the groups differed in what was most important to them.**

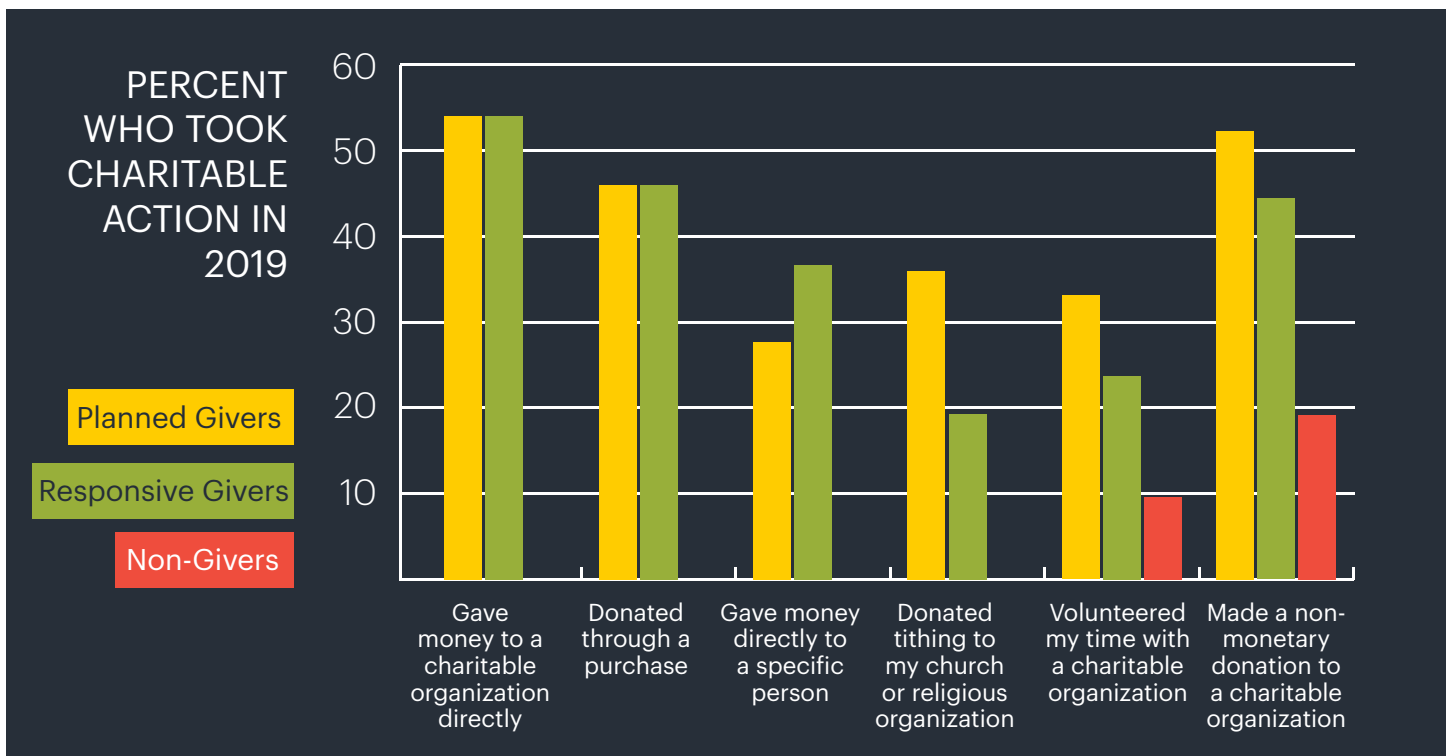
- All groups listed animal care (such as animal shelters and wildlife conservation) and human services (such as homeless shelters and food banks) among the top three most

important causes to them, and arts/culture, research/public policy and community development among the three *least* important causes.

- Planned Givers were more likely to list tithing as one of the top causes most important to them (32%).
- Responsive Givers were more likely than other groups to say that disaster relief giving, such as hurricane or wildfire relief, was an important cause to them (42%).
- Finally, Non-Givers were more likely than other groups to include education (37%) and civil rights (22%) among their most important causes.

**While Responsive Givers were more likely than Planned Givers to give because they were motivated by others, both groups often researched the organization on their own before giving.**

- When Responsive Givers donated, it was often because they were asked by others — either in person or online — to give, or because they were inspired by something they saw in TV or a movie.
- Planned Givers, however, were less swayed by these external sources. Over three in five Planned Givers said they decided to give on their own to the organization.
- However, both groups did their research before giving — 55% of Planned Givers and 65% of Responsive Givers took at least one action before giving, like seeking advice from others and researching the organization.
- The most common actions taken by both groups were online: a little over a third of each group visited the organization’s website/social media profiles and about a quarter of each group did an internet search about the organization.



## PERCENT WHO SELECTED EACH CAUSE AMONG 3 MOST IMPORTANT



### **Both Planned and Responsive Givers were very satisfied with their giving experiences, but would be more satisfied if they knew more about how their contributions were used.**

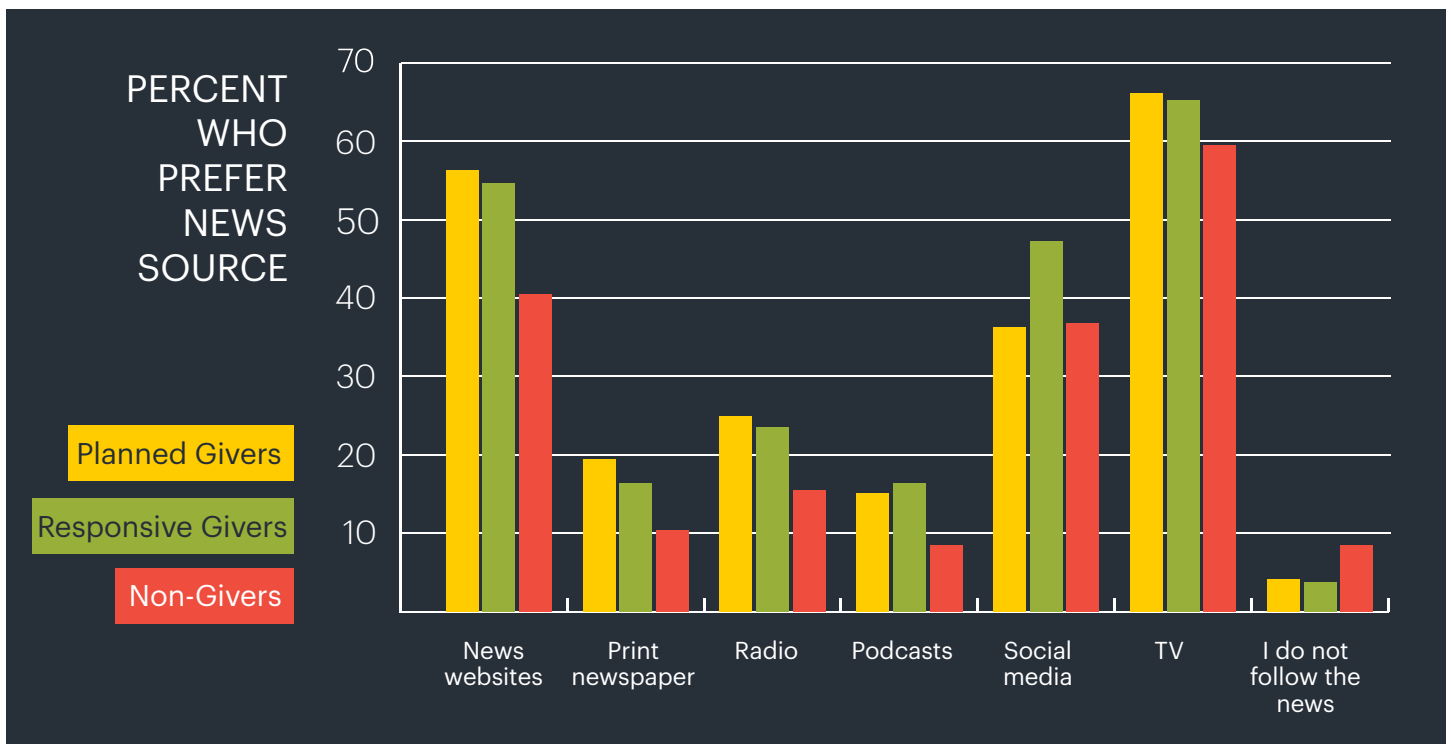
- On average, Planned Givers reported being more satisfied with their giving than Responsive Givers, though over half of both groups said they were “extremely” satisfied.
- For those who were not extremely satisfied, the most common reason was that they wished they could have given or raised more money than they did.
- About a quarter of each group also said they had lower satisfaction because they did not know how their contribution was used.

## **CULTURAL PROFILES FOR GIVING GROUPS**

**Both Responsive Givers and Planned Givers are heavy entertainment television watchers, although Responsive Givers skew toward reality shows while Planned Givers skew toward scripted television. Responsive Givers are most likely to be influenced by TV and celebrities to take action. While Non-Givers are overall less likely to watch entertainment television or follow the news, television remains a common news source for all groups.**

**Compared to other groups, Planned Givers were more likely to turn to print newspapers for news, while Responsive Givers were more likely to get their news from social media.**

- About one-in-five Planned Givers frequently got their news from print newspapers, compared to only 16% of Responsive Givers and 10% of Non-Givers.
- Nearly half of Responsive Givers (47%) got their news from social media. Only about a third of Planned Givers (36%) and Non-Givers (37%) said the same.



**Non-Givers were less likely to follow news than Planned Givers and Responsive Givers, but when they did, they turned most frequently to television.**

- Over half of all groups, including Non-Givers, said they got their news from television.
- However, Non-Givers were less likely than other groups to get their news from other popular sources, such as news websites and radio.

**Among those who turned to television for news, Responsive Givers were the most likely to watch late night comedy news and television talk shows. Non-Givers were less likely than other groups to get news from any source, but especially network shows.**

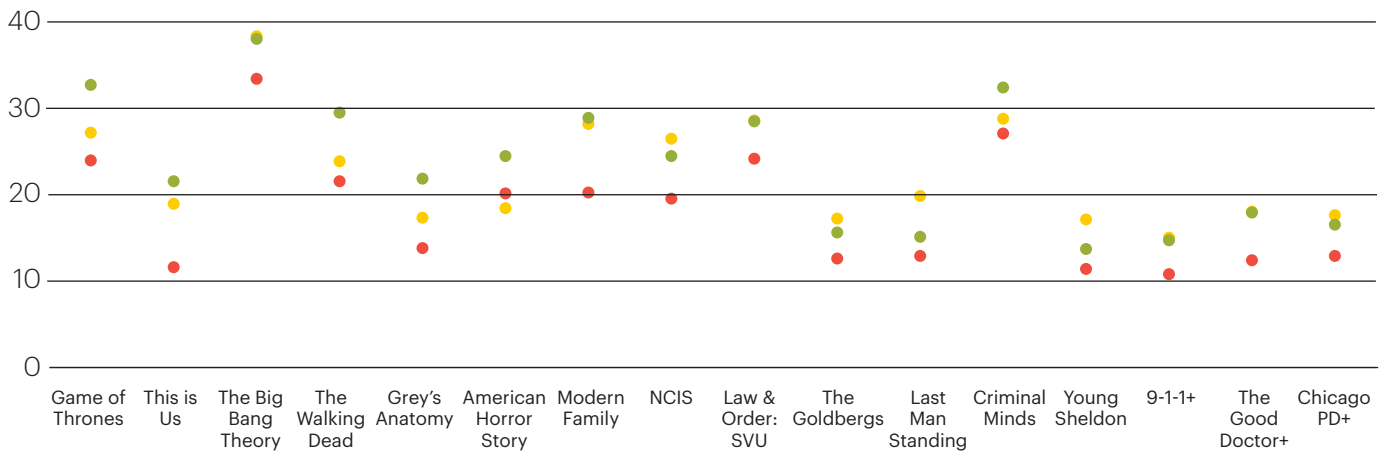
- Among those who said they got their news from television, local television was the most commonly watched type of news programming for all groups.
- Responsive Givers were more likely than other groups to say that they got their news from comedy TV shows, such as *Saturday Night Live* (19%). Non-Givers who get their news from television do so less than other groups, especially network shows. They were less likely than the other groups to tune into network morning shows like *Good Morning America* and the *Today Show*, as well as network nightly shows such as *World News Tonight* and *CBS Evening News*.

**In addition to news, we asked which of the top 71 scripted, unscripted, and TV talk shows they watched. There were substantial differences in how often each of the three groups watched television, and what shows they enjoyed watching most often.**

- Responsive Givers watched all types of popular TV, but in particular, watched popular reality TV and talk shows more often than other groups. For example, this group was more likely than others to enjoy *Game of Thrones* (33%), *Jimmy Kimmel Live* (26%), *The Tonight Show* (31%), and *The Voice* (28%).

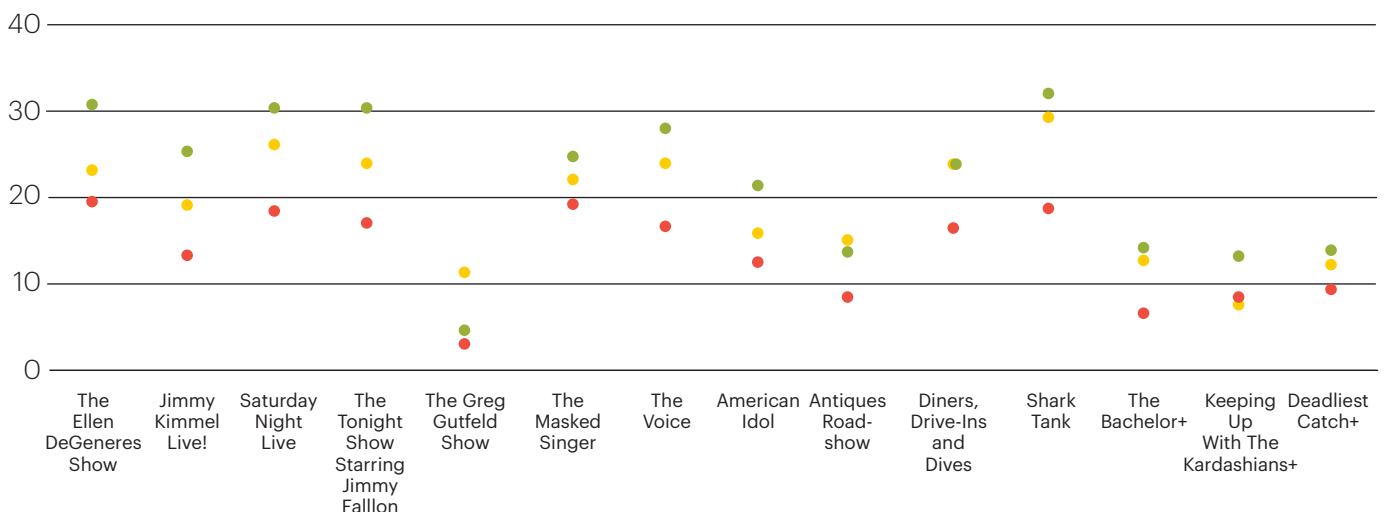
- Planned Givers most often enjoyed scripted television, and were less likely than Responsive Givers to tune into popular reality and TV talk shows. Some shows that this group enjoyed more than others included *The Greg Gutfeld Show* on Fox News (11%), and working class comedies like *Last Man Standing* (20%) and *The Goldbergs* (17%).
- Non-Givers watched less entertainment television than others, but still sometimes tuned into the most popular shows on television, such as *The Big Bang Theory* (33%), *The Masked Singer* (19%), and *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* (20%).
- With the exception of *Game of Thrones*, all scripted shows displayed below included at least one charitable giving mention since 2008. Several of these shows were also included in the scripted content analysis, including *Law & Order: SVU*, *The Goldbergs*, and *Young Sheldon*.

## PERCENT WHO ENJOYED SCRIPTED SHOWS IN 2019



(+=Only asked about in Wave 1)

## PERCENT WHO ENJOYED REALITY & TV TALK SHOWS IN 2019



(+=Only asked about in Wave 1)

Planned Givers

Responsive Givers

Non-Givers



**The groups also differed in other media preferences, beyond TV and news.**

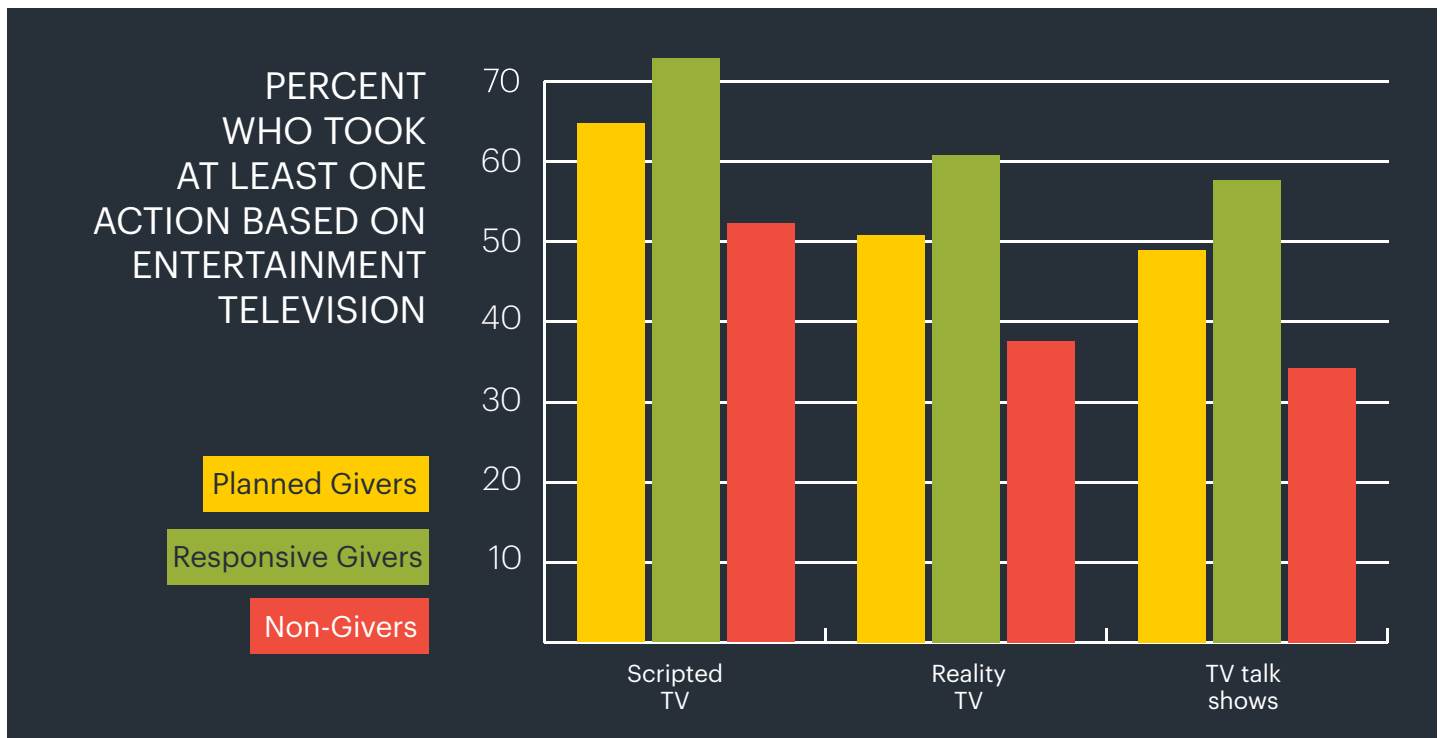
- Planned Givers were more likely than other groups to listen to podcasts, sports, and news/talk programs. Responsive Givers were most likely to listen to popular music genres, like pop and hip-hop. Finally, Non-Givers were more likely to enjoy heavy metal and rock music.
- Responsive Givers played video games more frequently than others, though at least three-in-five respondents across groups said they played video games multiple times a week or daily.
- Across all groups, about three-quarters were regular Facebook users, but Responsive Givers were most likely, and Non-Givers the least likely, to regularly use other social media sites like Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat. Planned Givers were most likely to regularly use LinkedIn.

**Planned Givers were the most likely, and Non-Givers the least likely, to consume sports-related entertainment.**

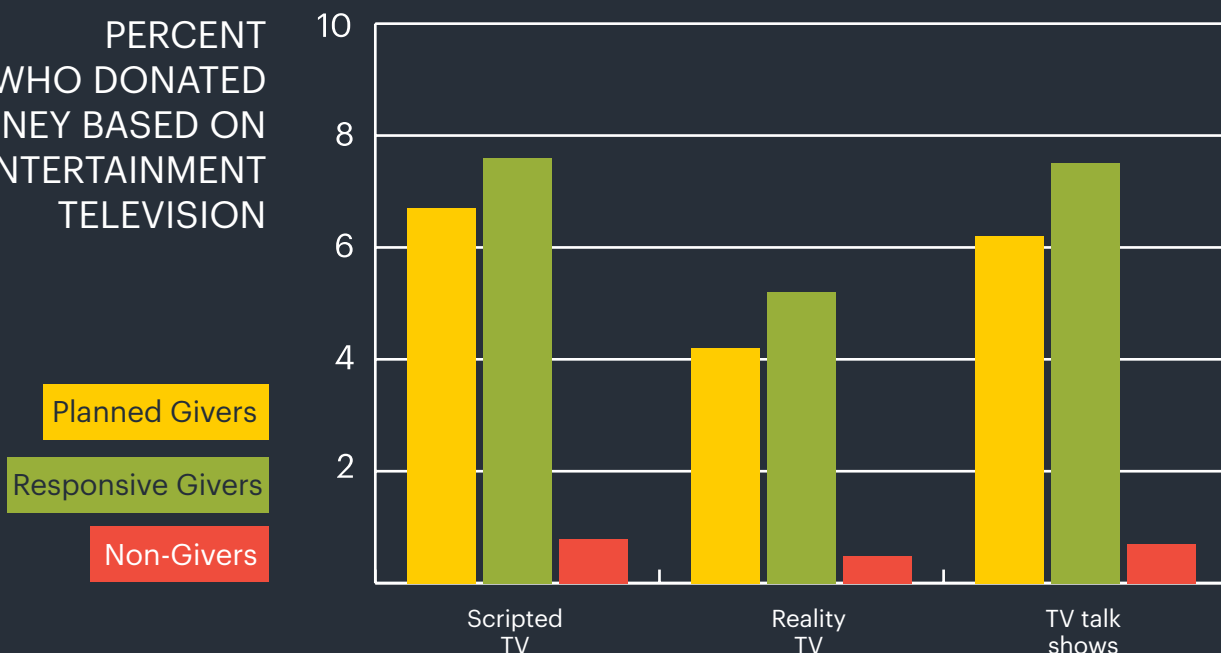
- Planned Givers were more likely to listen to, read about, or watch the most popular sports like baseball, basketball and football, as well as some niche sports like golf, hockey, and gymnastics.
- Responsive Givers were most likely to follow other niche sports like boxing and martial arts.

**Responsive Givers were the most likely to have taken civic actions based on something they learned from entertainment television.**

- All groups were more likely to take action based on something they saw in scripted television than other entertainment television contexts.



PERCENT WHO DONATED MONEY BASED ON ENTERTAINMENT TELEVISION



- The most common actions reported across groups were relatively low-investment, like seeking more information, or talking about the topic with a friend or family member.
- Responsive Givers were more inspired by all types of entertainment television to take a variety of civic actions, including high-investment actions like registering to vote.

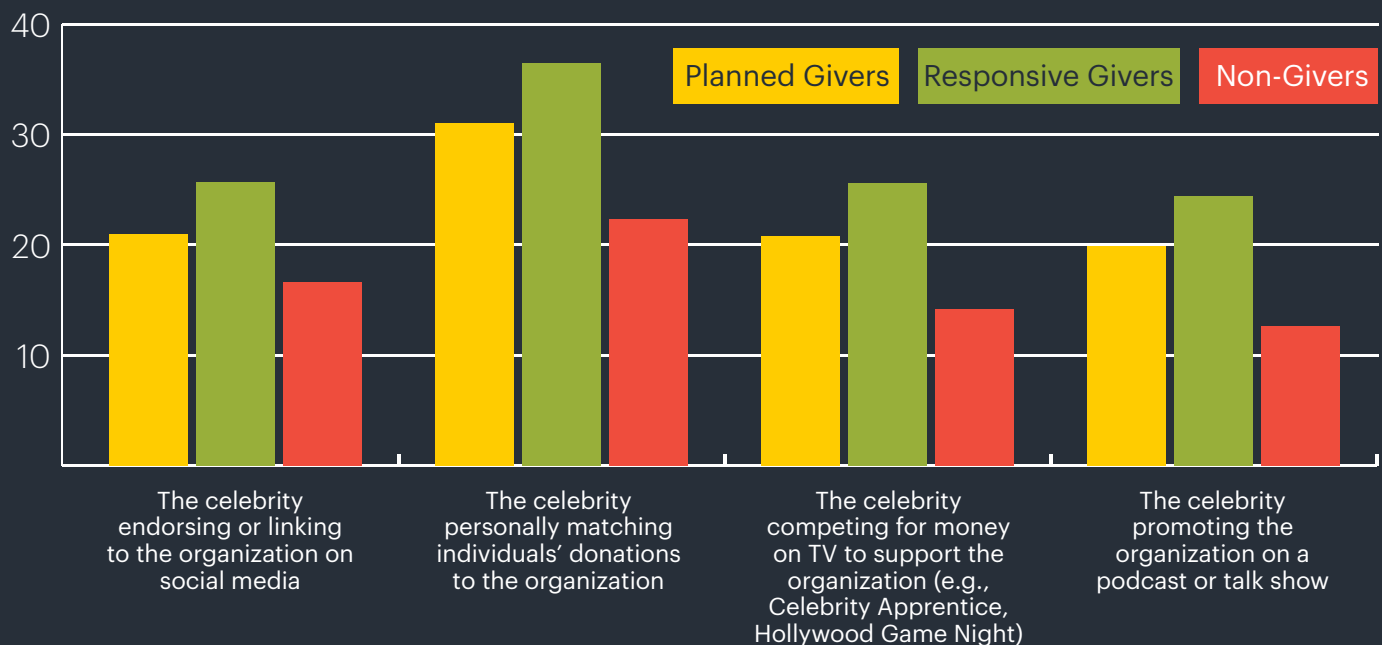
**Scripted television and TV talk shows were more likely to inspire viewers to donate to a charitable cause than reality television.**

- Between 6%-8% of Planned Givers and Responsive Givers made a donation in support of a charity or foundation based on something they had learned from each of scripted, reality, and TV talk shows.
- Non-Givers were significantly less likely than others to have been motivated by each of the three television contexts to give to a charitable organization than other groups.

**Similarly, Responsive Givers were more likely than others to be influenced by a celebrity endorsement to give to a charitable cause.**

- Over half (54.5%) of Responsive Givers said that they would be “somewhat” or “very” positively influenced by a celebrity supporting a charitable cause to give to that organization, compared to only two-in-five Planned Givers and a third of Non-Givers.
- Across groups, respondents said they would be more influenced by a celebrity personally matching individuals’ donations than other types of celebrity influence: endorsing or linking to the organization, competing for money on TV to support the organization, or promoting the organization on a talk show.

## PERCENT WHO WOULD BE AT LEAST “SOMEWHAT” INFLUENCED TO DONATE BY:



**All groups were highly motivated to tune into entertainment for fun or to be put in a good mood. However, Responsive Givers also turned to entertainment for meaningful experiences.**

- Responsive Givers were most likely to look for meaning in entertainment, such as depictions that inspired them to think or challenged their way of seeing the world. They also were most likely to enjoy moments of sadness or poignancy in entertainment.
- Non-Givers were the least likely to be motivated by a search for meaning in their entertainment choices.

## CHARITABLE GIVING ATTITUDES

**Planned Givers are the most confident givers; they believe their giving dollars make a difference in the causes that they care about and feel comfortable talking with their kids about giving. They also are most likely to believe that non-government entities are responsible for solving society’s problems, while Responsive Givers are more likely to think it is the government’s responsibility.**

**Planned Givers were most likely, and Non-Givers the least likely, to believe their giving dollars make a significant difference in the causes they care about.**

- On average, Planned Givers were the most confident that their giving is effective, agreeing with statements like “Non-profit organizations rely on gifts like mine to operate” and “My giving makes a difference in the causes that I care about.”
- Responsive Givers had lower confidence than Planned Givers, but *greater* confidence than Non-Givers.

**Respondents across all groups were more confident that their donation would make a difference closer to home than in more distant contexts.**

- All groups were more confident that their donation could make a difference in their local community than in the United States or in other countries.
- In all contexts, Planned Givers had the greatest confidence that their donation made a difference, and Non-Givers had the least.

**We asked respondents who they think should be responsible for solving society’s problems — private individuals, the charitable sector, and/or the government. Responsive Givers were more likely to say the government should handle society’s problems, while Planned Givers were more likely to say non-governmental entities have this duty.**

- Planned Givers were more likely than others to say that major problems should be handled through non-governmental entities: individual people and families, non-profit/charitable organizations, and religious institutions.
- On the other hand, Responsive Givers were the most likely to say that the government — both at the federal and state/local levels — has a duty to solve major problems in our society today.
- Across groups, participants in July were more likely to think that *all* parties had a duty to solve society’s problems, relative to April participants. This included government, non-government organizations, and individual people.
- In July, we also asked participants how much they thought business corporations should be responsible for solving society’s problems. July Planned and Responsive Givers assigned corporations a little more responsibility than non-profit organizations, but less than the government. Non-Givers were less likely than other groups to think that either corporations or nonprofit organizations should have this responsibility.



**Finally, we asked parents about giving with their kids, to check their baseline confidence, and to see if additional tools and resources are needed. Among parents, Planned Givers and those with older kids were most likely to feel confident talking about giving with their kids.**

- Planned Givers were most likely, and Non-Givers the least likely, to feel confident they have the tools and resources they need to talk to their children about giving and giving as a family.
- Regardless of group membership, parents with teenage children talked more with their kids about giving and felt they had the resources and tools needed to talk about giving as a family, compared to parents with kids 5 years of age or younger.

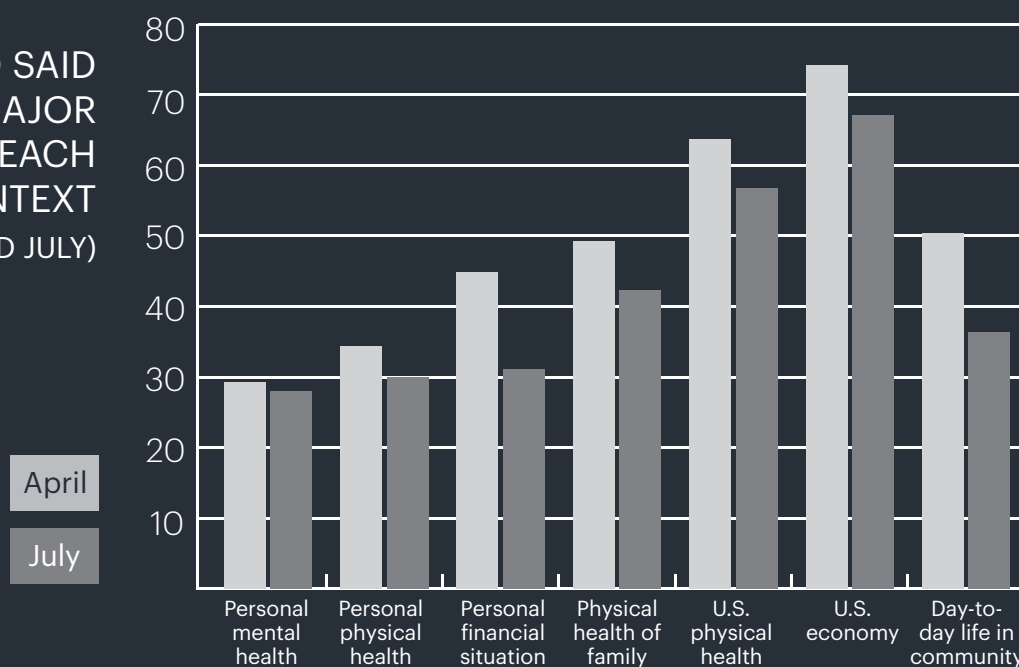
## COVID-19 FINDINGS

**All groups saw COVID as a bigger threat to the country as a whole than for themselves personally, and overall concern about the pandemic significantly decreased between April and July. Responsive Givers were most likely to respond to COVID by donating money, but Planned Givers were most likely to donate large amounts of money. The pandemic moved about one-in-five Non-Givers to donate, typically in small amounts.**

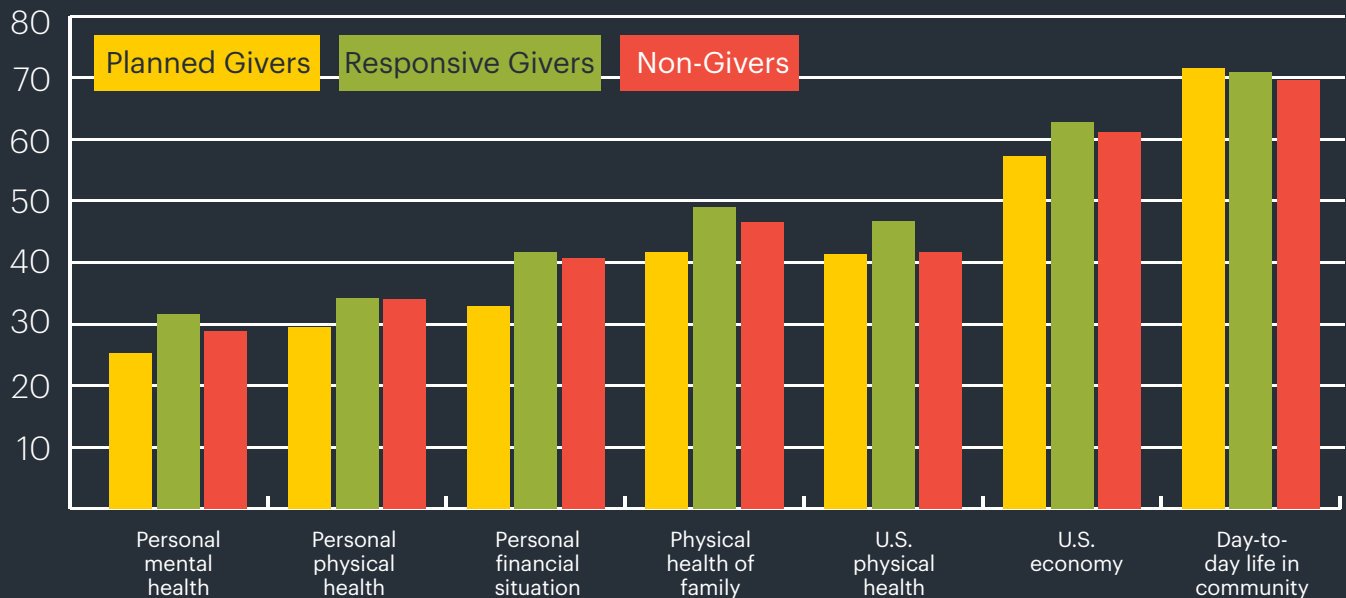
**Across all giving groups, respondents saw COVID as a more serious threat — both to health and the economy — in April than July.**

- April survey participants were significantly more likely to say that COVID represented “a major threat” to their personal financial situation (45%) than July participants (31%).
- Perceived seriousness of COVID across all other areas of concern either remained stagnant (e.g., personal mental and physical health) or decreased (e.g., day-to-day life, personal financial situation, physical health of the US population) from April to July.

PERCENT WHO SAID COVID IS A “MAJOR THREAT” IN EACH CONTEXT (APRIL AND JULY)



## PERCENT WHO SAID COVID IS A “MAJOR THREAT” IN EACH CONTEXT: (DATA COMBINES BOTH WAVES)



### **Overall, Planned Givers were less likely than other groups to see COVID as a serious threat to them personally and their family.**

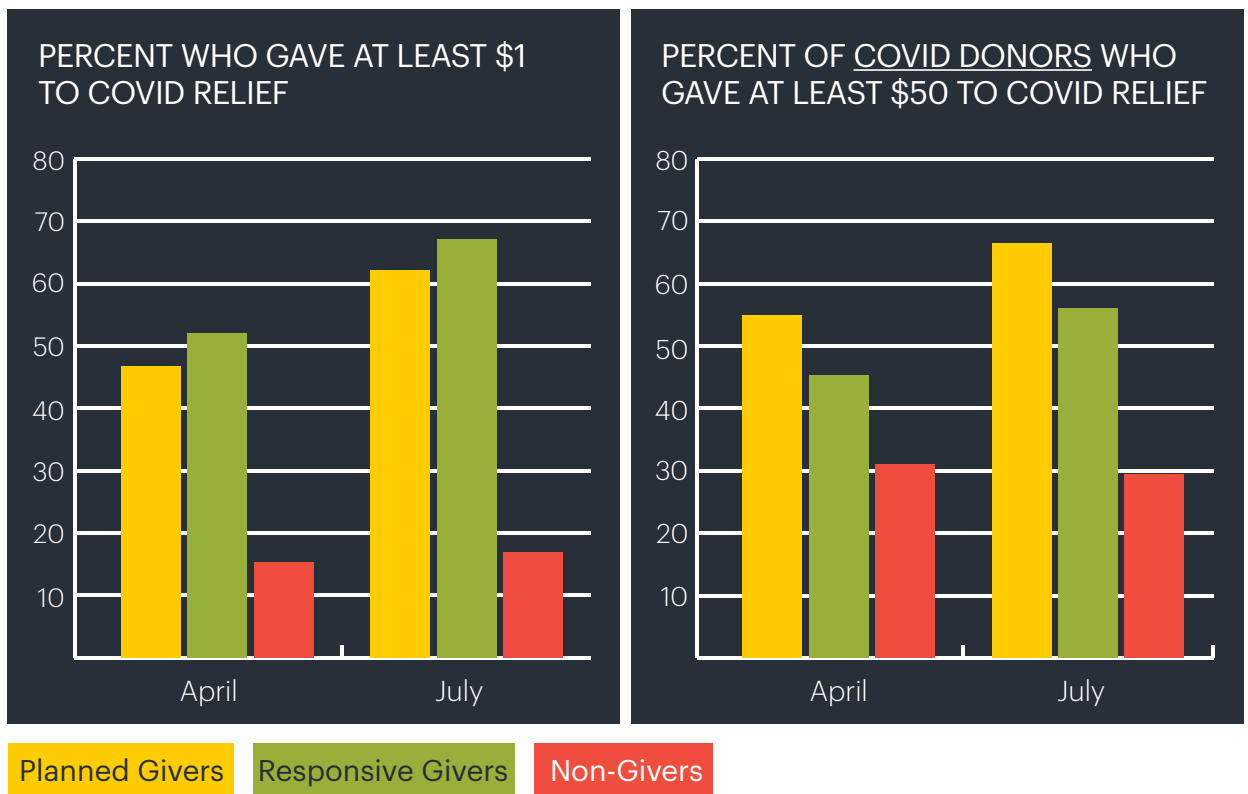
- In both April and July, Planned Givers were less likely than other groups to say COVID poses a serious threat to themselves and their families, including their personal financial situation, their mental and physical health, and the physical health of their family.

### **Despite seeing COVID as a less serious threat in July, the percentage of Responsive and Planned Givers who gave any amount to COVID relief increased between the two survey waves.**

- As of April, 47% of Planned Givers had donated to COVID relief, and this percentage increased to 62% by July. Donations to COVID relief among Responsive Givers similarly rose from 51% by April to 67% by July.
- While Non-Givers were much less likely than Planned or Responsive Givers to donate anything to COVID relief, they did give. They were more likely to give early in the pandemic — 15% by April and 17% by July.

### **COVID-related donations most often went to organizations like the Red Cross or local food banks. Responsive Givers were more likely to donate smaller amounts, and Planned Givers larger amounts.**

- The most common organizations that individuals donated to included the Red Cross, Salvation Army, and local food banks/pantries.
- While Responsive Givers were slightly more likely to have donated at all (52-67%), Planned Givers were more likely to have donated more than \$50 (55-67% of total donors). These findings were consistent in both April and July.



**Among those who gave to COVID relief, Planned Givers were more likely to continue to give to other causes in 2020.**

- Planned Givers were the most likely to say their COVID relief donations would be in addition to their donations to non-COVID related causes and organizations.
- Responsive Givers, in contrast, were more likely to say they planned to decrease their giving to other organizations in 2020 because of their COVID donations.

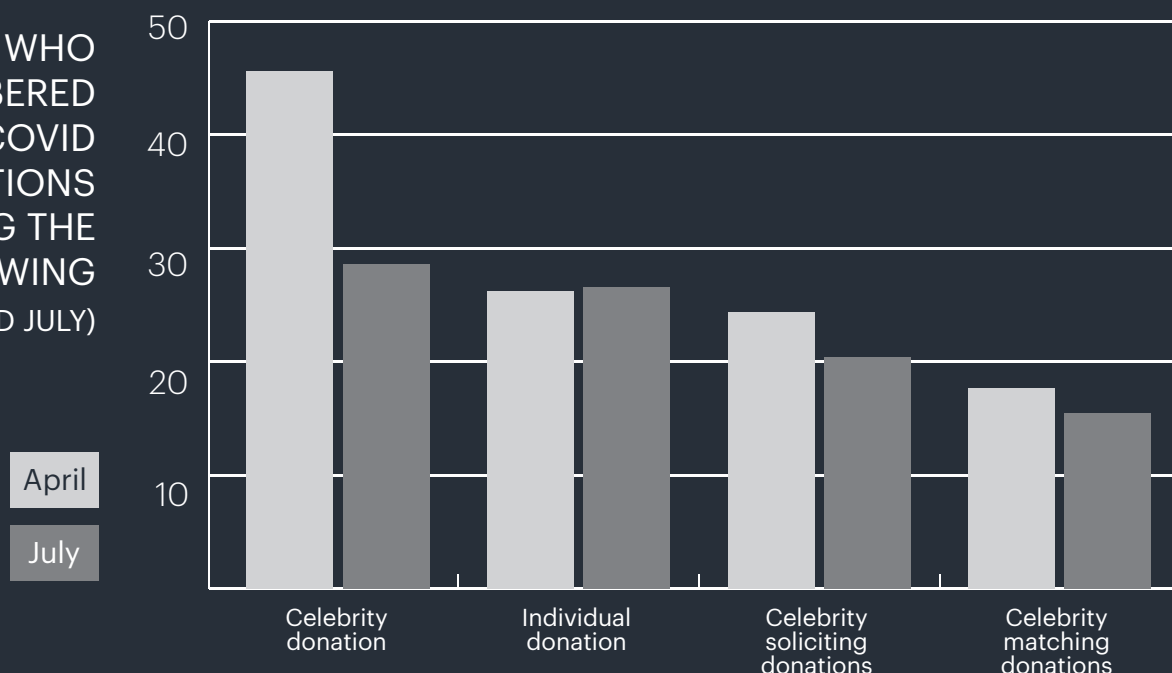
**Empathy was associated with giving more money to COVID relief, but only for Planned Givers.**

- Planned Givers who had high levels of emotional empathy, such as feeling touched by things they see happen around them, gave more to COVID relief than those who were not as empathetic.
- Among Responsive Givers and Non-Givers, however, empathy did not predict how much money they gave to COVID relief.

**Across giving groups, April participants were more likely than July participants to remember seeing depictions of celebrities donating to COVID relief on television or social media.**

- About a quarter of participants in both survey waves remembered seeing stories of individuals in their community donating to COVID relief.
- However, participants were more likely to remember seeing a mention of charitable giving by celebrities, politicians, or philanthropists in April (46%) than in July (29%).
- Non-Givers were less likely than Planned Givers and Responsive Givers to remember seeing depictions of either individual or celebrity giving in the news or social media.

PERCENT WHO REMEMBERED SEEING COVID DEPICTIONS INVOLVING THE FOLLOWING (APRIL AND JULY)



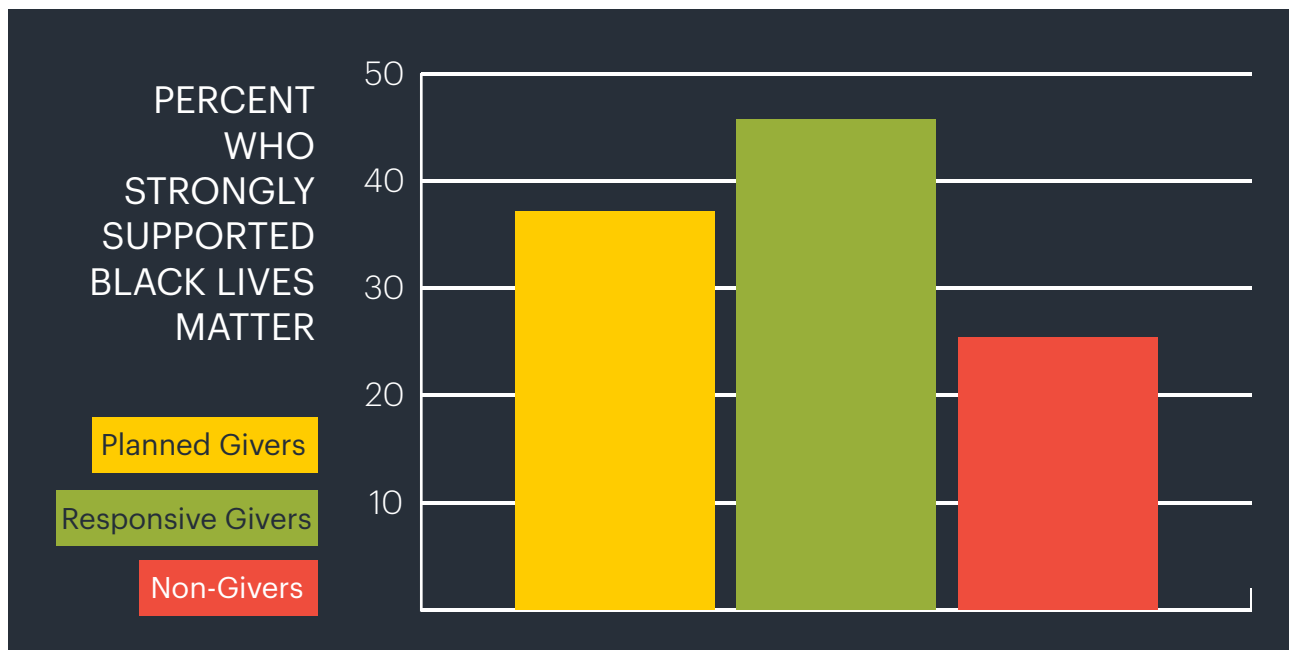
**Participants were more likely to recall seeing depictions of celebrity giving than local community giving. However, seeing depictions of local community giving was associated with greater likelihood of donating to COVID relief.**

- Participants who remembered seeing stories about individuals in their community donating to COVID relief were more likely to donate at least \$1 to COVID themselves (66%) compared to those who didn't see the stories (40%), regardless of how serious they thought the pandemic was or how closely they followed COVID news.
- However, seeing a celebrity donation or celebrity solicitation was not associated with personal giving.

**When personal stimulus checks were announced in April, over half of survey participants predicted they would use that money for need-based spending. However, July participants were more likely than anticipated to spend their stimulus checks on non-essential purchases that might support the economy.**

- In April, about three-in-five Responsive Givers and Non-Givers and roughly half of Planned Givers who were expecting a stimulus check said they would use at least part of this money on immediate need-based spending, such as rent or bills.
- In July, about half of Responsive and Non-Givers and 45% of Planned Givers who had received a stimulus check said they actually used any of the funds for need-based spending.
- However, this did not result in giving significantly more stimulus money than anticipated to charitable organizations or individuals in need, for either Responsive Givers (8% anticipated vs. 9% actual) or Planned Givers (11% anticipated vs. 13% actual).
- Instead, participants were more likely than anticipated to spend money on non-essential purposes to help the economy, including Responsive Givers (11% anticipated vs. 18% actual) and Planned Givers (12% anticipated vs. 15% actual).





**All giving groups turned most frequently to television and news websites to get their news about COVID-19.**

- The most common source of COVID information across giving groups was local and cable television and news websites.
- Non-Givers were more likely to say they did not follow COVID-related news, and were less likely than the other groups to tune into cable TV, network morning shows, and network nightly shows for COVID news.
- Responsive Givers were more likely than others to get their COVID-related news from social media sites, including Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, Instagram, and YouTube.
- Planned Givers were slightly more likely than other groups to get their COVID-related news from podcasts, radio, and print newspapers.

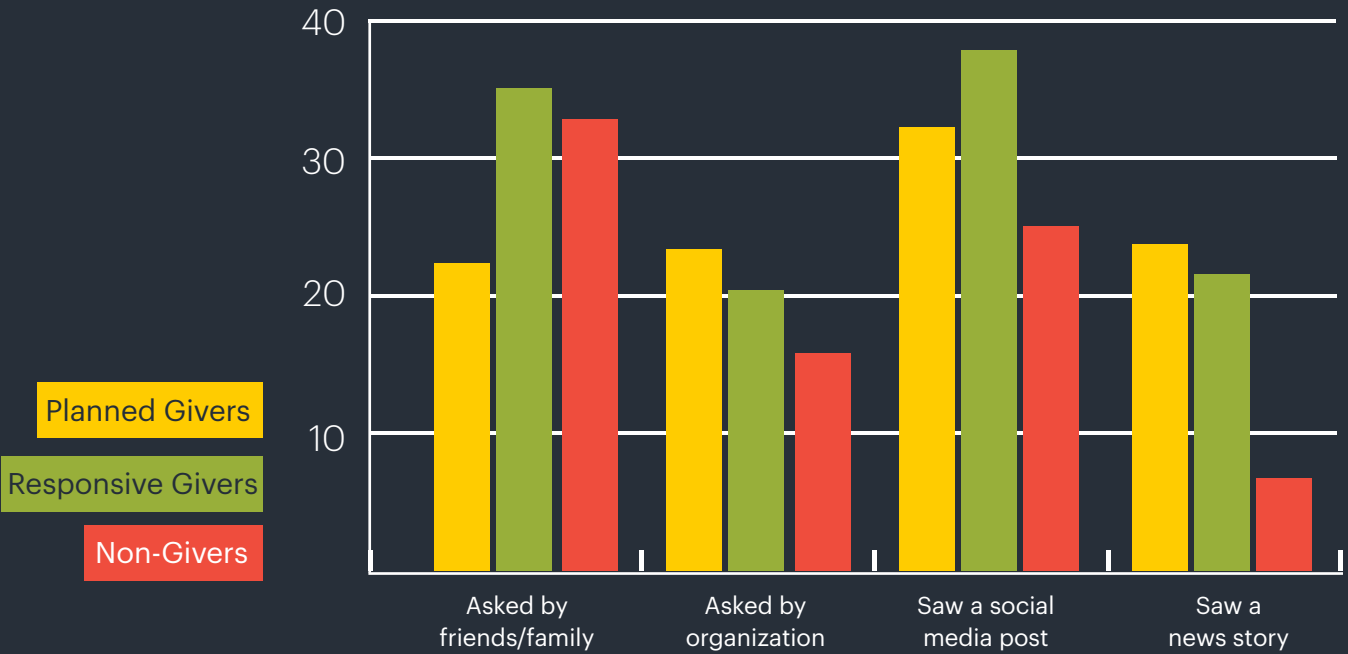
**BLACK LIVES MATTER AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION**

**In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and others by police sparked massive protests nationwide. While Responsive Givers and Planned Givers both followed this news closely, Responsive Givers were much more supportive of the Black Lives Matter movement and, unsurprisingly, were more likely to donate to organizations addressing racial discrimination. Non-Givers were less likely to donate to racial discrimination organizations than to COVID relief.**

**Two-in-five Responsive Givers and Planned Givers said they were closely following news about racial discrimination in policing, but Responsive Givers were more supportive than Planned Givers of the Black Lives Matter movement.**

- About 40% of Planned and Responsive Givers said that they have followed recent news about racial discrimination in policing “very closely,” compared to only 30% of Non-Givers.

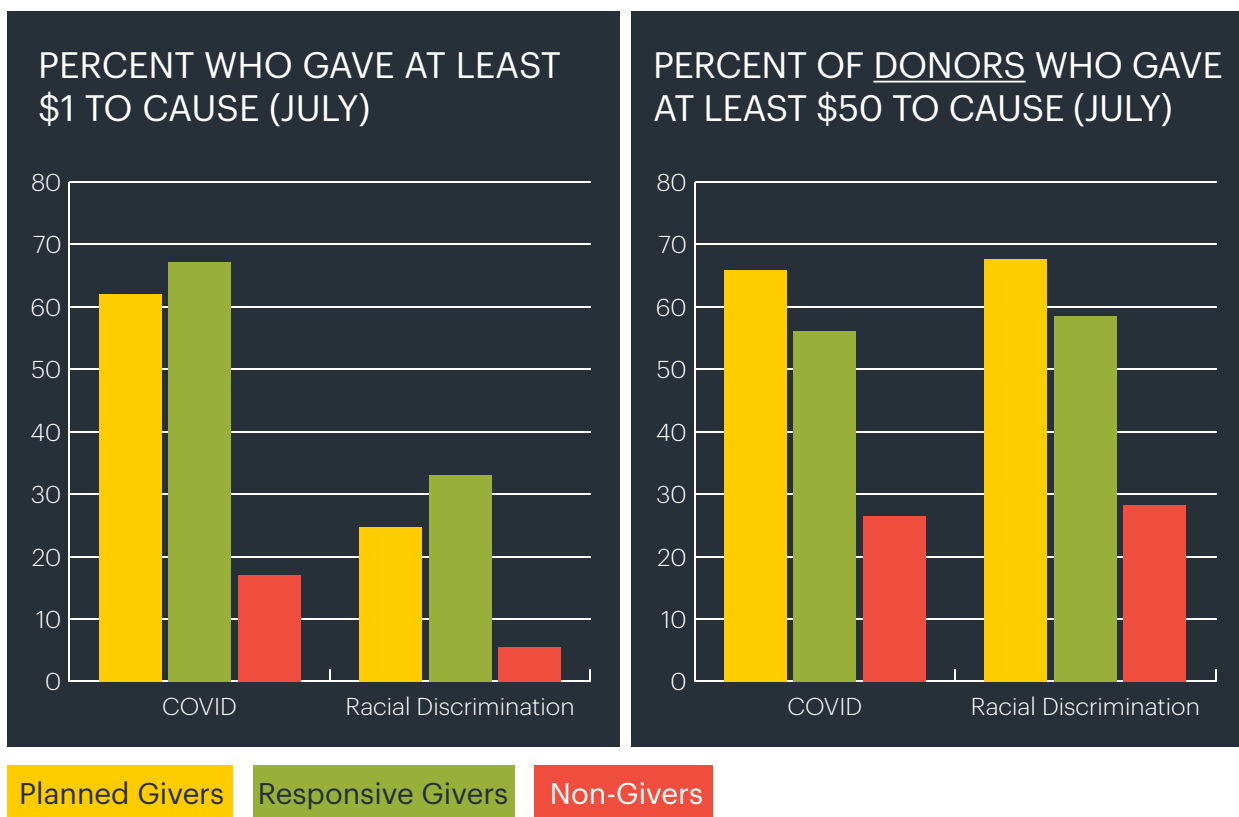
PERCENT PROMPTED TO MAKE RACIAL DISCRIMINATION DONATION BY THE FOLLOWING:



- Despite similar levels of interest, Responsive Givers were much more likely to say they “strongly supported” the Black Lives Matter movement (47%), compared to only a third of Planned Givers and Non-Givers.
- Responsive Givers were also more likely than others to say that too little attention has been paid to racial discrimination in America (37% Responsive Givers vs. 32% Non-Givers and 28% Planned Givers).

**Similar to COVID relief, Responsive Givers were more likely to give money to organizations addressing racial discrimination than Planned Givers.**

- A third of Responsive Givers gave money to organizations fighting against racial discrimination, compared to a quarter of Planned Givers, and only 6% of Non-Givers. These organizations most commonly included the NAACP, Black Lives Matter, and Color Of Change.
- Among those who gave money to an organization addressing racial discrimination, Responsive Givers were most likely to say that friends or family asking them to give or seeing a social media post prompted their donation. In contrast, being asked directly by the organization or seeing a news story were more persuasive for Planned Givers.



**Across giving groups, July respondents were more likely to have given to COVID relief than organizations fighting racial discrimination. Despite having fewer donors, those who gave money to address racial discrimination were equally likely to have given in larger amounts as COVID donors.**

- Overall, over half of participants had given at least \$1 to COVID relief while only about a quarter had given to charitable organizations addressing racial discrimination in 2020.
- While people were more likely to give to COVID relief in any amount, donors were equally likely to give to the causes in larger amounts (at least \$50). Overall, about 60% of donors gave in larger amounts for both COVID and racial discrimination.

---

# ■ CHARITABLE GIVING ON TV

## INTRODUCTION

To establish a baseline for how often charitable giving appears in U.S. news and entertainment programming, we monitored the frequency of mentions of twelve keywords related to giving. The source of data for this analysis was the TVEyes database, which includes closed captioning transcripts of programming and commercials on all national broadcast networks, every local TV market, and all basic cable TV programming — 916 stations in total.

Through several tests of the TVEyes database, we identified twelve charitable giving keywords: **charity, charities, charitable, donate, donation, donor, fundraiser, fundraising, “GivingTuesday,”<sup>1</sup> “Giving Pledge,” philanthropist, and philanthropy**. These keywords returned 1,142,588 charitable mentions accounting for 15 billion impressions.<sup>2</sup> To provide some perspective, these 12 keywords combined appeared about half as many mentions as the word “football” alone would appear on television over 120 days.<sup>3</sup>

Our goal was to identify Americans’ aggregate exposure to charitable giving mentions. So after capturing and organizing all giving mentions, we eliminated all duplicate mentions (from programming airing on multiple channels), all content with no reach data, and all content with under 5,000 impressions. This process left us with a final sample of 295,400 unique charitable giving mentions for analysis.

## DATA COLLECTION PERIODS

We applied the twelve keywords during three separate 40-day periods between November 2019 and June 2020, which included 2.6 million hours of U.S. television content.

### **Giving Season Period (November 24, 2019 - January 2, 2020):**

- Most charitable giving in the U.S. takes place between GivingTuesday (the Tuesday following Thanksgiving) and the end of the calendar year.<sup>4</sup>
- This period included charitable giving mentions from Thanksgiving week, the lead-up to GivingTuesday, Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, and the last week of the year. This is when many donors make their last donations of the year for tax purposes.
- Charitable giving mentions during this period had 5 billion impressions.

1. All queries were for “Giving Tuesday,” but this report uses the official name of the day, which is all one word: “GivingTuesday.”
2. Impressions refer to the amount of views each charitable giving mention received based on viewership data from TVEyes.
3. A TVEyes search of “football” over the month of October 2020 provided an average of 20,749 mentions per day, which would scale to 2,489,880 over a 120 day period.
4. Gomez, R. (2020, September 18). *10 year-end giving statistics every fundraiser should know*. Neon One. <https://neonone.com/blog/year-end-giving-statistics/>

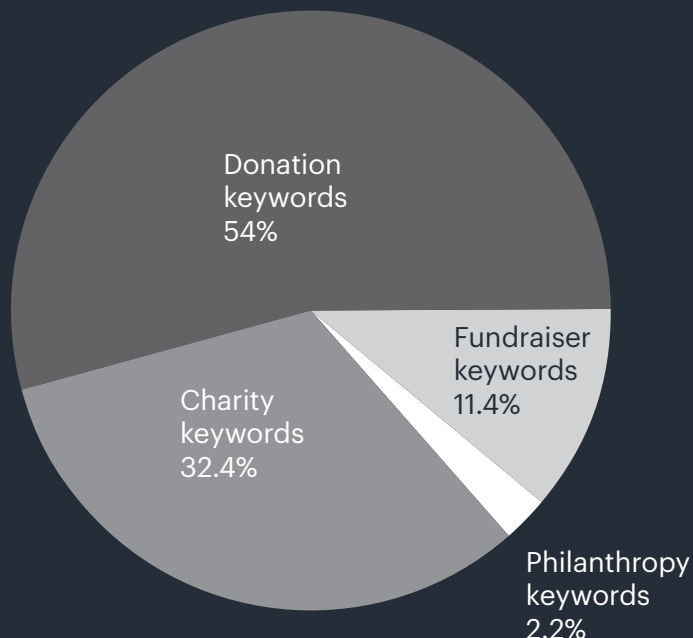
### Normative Period (February 1, 2020 - March 11, 2020):

- This period allowed us to compare charitable giving depictions during Giving Season with a more typical time of year.
- It included the Super Bowl and the most consequential part of the Democratic Presidential Primary timeline — from the Iowa Caucuses to when most candidates dropped out, forming a two-candidate race between Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders.
- This period also included media coverage of the first U.S. COVID-19 related deaths and speculation about forthcoming changes to daily life in America due to the Coronavirus.
- Charitable giving mentions during this period had 4 billion impressions.

### COVID-19 Period (April 27, 2020 - June 5, 2020):

- This period started when there were over 50,000 COVID-19 related deaths in the U.S. Most of the country was adjusting to massive disruptions to daily life, including safer-at-home mandates, unprecedented unemployment numbers, and large-scale shutdowns across myriad industries.
- Toward the end of this period, the Minneapolis killing of George Floyd launched global Black Lives Matter protests and massive social unrest across the country.
- This period also includes the “GivingTuesday Now” nationwide campaign on May 5th and Red Nose Day on May 21st.
- Charitable giving mentions during this period had the greatest audience reach, with about 6 billion impressions.

## CHARITABLE GIVING IMPRESSIONS BY KEYWORD



## IMPRESSIONS BY KEYWORD

**Donation-related keywords (donate, donation, donor) represented more than half of all impressions, while charity-related keywords (charity, charities, charitable) comprised one third.**

- “Donate” garnered the most impressions (28%), followed by “Charity” (21%) and “Donation” (18%). Fundraiser-related keywords (fundraiser, fundraising) represented 11% of impressions, and philanthropic keywords (philanthropy, philanthropist) comprised just 2%.
- Mentions of the “Giving Pledge” represented 2.1% of all impressions. They were heard over 311 million times, almost exclusively in Democratic Presidential candidate Tom Steyer’s campaign commercials.
- Mentions of “GivingTuesday” were prevalent during the beginning of the Giving Season and during the “GivingTuesday Now” campaign in May. The keyword represented 1.9% of all impressions at 291 million.

---

# CHARITABLE GIVING BY GENRE

We classified all charitable giving mentions into five genres of programming: news, commercials, sports, unscripted entertainment, and scripted entertainment.

## NEWS PROGRAMMING

---

**Whether it was the heart of Giving Season, the middle of February, or the peak period of COVID, Americans were most likely to hear about charitable giving from news programming.**

- Accounting for 79% of all impressions, local and national news references to charitable giving were heard 12 billion times over 120 days.
- The dominance of news programming was especially lopsided in the COVID-19 data collection period, where 92% of impressions were in news stories.
- These findings are consistent with our landscape analysis of academic literature which found that media representations of charitable giving are predominantly in news.

**Typically, the news mentions with the greatest reach came from national network evening news programming and the network morning shows like *Good Morning America* and *The Today Show*.**

- The single news mention with the most impressions (at 37.2 million) was a bit of an outlier in that it was the word “charity” in the 2020 State of the Union address.<sup>5</sup>
- During Giving Season, a *60 Minutes* story with 9.6 million impressions mentioned the World Monuments Fund. Two *CBS Weekend News* stories — each with 9.6 million impressions — mentioned political fundraising and a family that raised money for local charities through donations to their spectacular home Christmas lights display.
- Also during Giving Season, *NBC Nightly News* aired a GivingTuesday story (with 6.5 million impressions) on a teenage TikTok influencer who raised thousands of dollars for children with special needs by doing a meet and greet with fans.
- Thirteen of the 14 highest reach mentions during the COVID period came from *ABC World News Tonight*, which averages over 8 million impressions per episode. These included a plea for plasma donations, a story about a 15-year-old in Texas who collected and donated thousands of masks and other personal protective equipment (PPE) to frontline medical workers, and a story about how companies like Cabot Cheese and Chobani were processing their extra milk to give to food charities.
- While the mentions garnering the most impressions were in national news, the vast majority of individual mentions were from local news programming.

5. The State of the Union was categorized as news programming because it aired under the news programming umbrellas for each network (e.g. *NBC News presents the State of the Union*).

---

## COMMERCIALS AND SPORTS

---

Charitable giving appeared in commercials and sports programming infrequently, but some commercials and sports programs received significant impressions.

- Commercials represented 6% of charitable giving impressions while sports programming accounted for only 2.4%.
- The commercial category also included infomercials, as well as PBS pledge and member requests that air during commercial breaks.

**During the Giving Season, four specific charitable giving commercials repeatedly aired during the broadcasts of highly viewed shows, and garnered millions of impressions each time they aired.**

- A commercial for Amazon Alexa mentioned donating to Toys For Tots.
- A General Mills commercial that tied in with the *Star Wars* movie release encouraged viewers to “do something good for the galaxy” by scanning their cereal box with their phone to donate to Feeding America.
- CBS Cares asked viewers to donate to St. Jude Research Hospital.
- Democratic Presidential candidate Tom Steyer mentioned his participation in the Giving Pledge in several of his campaign ads.

**Sports programming primarily focused on the philanthropic efforts of individual athletes and teams. The two charitable giving mentions with the greatest exposure across all three periods occurred during February’s Super Bowl broadcast, which received about 100 million impressions.**

- One was a WeatherTech.com commercial that encouraged donations to a pet organization.<sup>6</sup>
- The other was the announcement of Calais Campbell as the 2020 Walter Payton Man of the Year, an award recognizing the most charitable NFL player.

## UNSCRIPTED ENTERTAINMENT

---

Giving stories in unscripted programming can have a significant impact. Between the 1980s to the early 2000s, many charitable organizations were beneficiaries of The Oprah Effect.<sup>7</sup> One mention of a charity on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, and suddenly the organization was overwhelmed with donations.

**This penchant for highlighting charitable causes was mirrored in daytime talk shows — *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, *Wendy Williams*, *Tamron Hall*, *The Kelly Clarkson Show*, *The View*, and *The Talk* all included charitable giving storylines frequently.**

- These daytime talk shows average between 1-4 million viewers each episode, so the giving messages they feature receive significant exposure.

6. WeatherTech. (2020, January 27). *Lucky dog: 2020 WeatherTech Super Bowl commercial* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gckObDeYpAA>

7. O’Conner, C. (2012, September 17). *The Oprah Effect, charity edition*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/clare-oconnor/2012/09/17/the-oprah-effect-charity-edition/#6699756f3ea2>

---

8. Ellen Digital Ventures. (2019). *Ellen's favorite inspiring Shutterfly moments* [Video]. EllenTube. <https://www.ellentube.com/video/ellens-favorite-inspiring-shutterfly-moments.html>

- For example, two million viewers heard several giving keywords when Kelly Clarkson teamed up with the cast of *Sesame Street* to talk about how viewers can give back to their communities on GivingTuesday.
- Charitable giving is a major component of *The Ellen DeGeneres* show — through its partnership with Shutterfly, they have given away over \$10 million.<sup>8</sup>

### **Game shows commonly addressed charitable giving through a contestant's giving story or through celebrity contestants who are playing for a cause.**

- For example, on an episode of *Jeopardy* with 8.7 million impressions, a contestant explained to Alex Trebek how she gives away thousands of dollars to a cancer charity.
- Game shows also featured celebrity contestants who were playing for a cause. The word "charity" was mentioned five times on a special *The Price Is Right At Night* episode (6.6 million impressions) that raised money for the Headstrong Project, a charity providing mental health treatment for 9/11 survivors and their families.

### **Charitable mentions in unscripted entertainment had over 1 billion impressions.**

- Unscripted entertainment accounted for only 7% of charitable giving mentions, but 35% of the most viewed mentions (those with over 5 million views).
- Unscripted mentions were particularly prevalent during the COVID-19 period of data collection. This was partly because coronavirus relief specials were included in the unscripted category. For example, *The Rise Up New York* special, which raised \$115 million for people impacted by the virus in New York, had 7.4 million impressions.
- The mention with the greatest reach in our Giving Season period came from a *Saturday Night Live* sketch with 12 million impressions that mocked a political fundraiser. In an episode of *Judge Judy* (8.4 million impressions), the titular judge reminded the plaintiff million that she is a judge and "not a charity."

## **SCRIPTED TELEVISION**

### **Across all 120 days of data collection, scripted mentions had over 850 million impressions. Here are a few examples:**

- An *NCIS* episode about donating to the VA had over 11 million impressions.
- A *New Amsterdam* storyline about a philanthropic donation to rename a hospital wing drew 8 million impressions.
- *The Good Doctor* had 8.4 million impressions for a storyline involving a meeting with a donor to the hospital.
- Jennifer Love-Hewitt's character on *9-1-1* debated whether to keep or donate the \$482,000 she received after her abusive ex-husband was killed, generating nearly 8 million impressions.



- There were multiple mentions of a church charity fundraiser on *The Neighborhood*, drawing 6 million impressions.
- There were 4 million impressions for a *Young Sheldon* rerun where Sheldon calls and gets donations for the local church.

**While the vast majority of charitable giving mentions and impressions were in news, each mention in scripted entertainment reached more people.**

- During the Giving Season, each mention of charitable giving in news averaged 42,000 impressions. When charitable giving was mentioned on a scripted TV show, however, it averaged over 285,000 impressions. This includes both new episodes that are broadcast to millions of viewers and syndicated episodes in individual local markets that are seen by thousands of viewers.
- Scripted entertainment accounted for only 6% of mentions, but 22% of the highest exposure mentions (those with over 5 million impressions).

## CHARITABLE GIVING BY TOPIC

9. Ndulue, E. B. (2019, April 22). *Giving and philanthropy in the US: Analysis of discourse in news and social media*. Media Cloud. <https://mediacloud.org/news/2019/4/22/giving-and-philanthropy-in-the-us-analysis-of-discourse-in-news-and-social-media>

The words surrounding charitable giving mentions on TV were examined to understand the context of the depiction and associated topics. Fourteen topic categories were identified based on insights from our landscape analysis, stakeholder interviews, and the online news charitable giving analysis from an analysis of charitable giving in online news by Media Cloud.<sup>9</sup>

- |  |                 |
|--|-----------------|
| ● Animals  | ● Education     |
| ● Arts & Culture   | ● Environment   |
| ● Children   | ● Health        |
| ● Community  | ● Human Rights  |
| ● COVID-19 (only for final two periods of data collection) | ● Politics      |
| ● Disaster Relief  | ● Poverty       |
|  | ● Religion      |
|  | ● Trust & Scams |

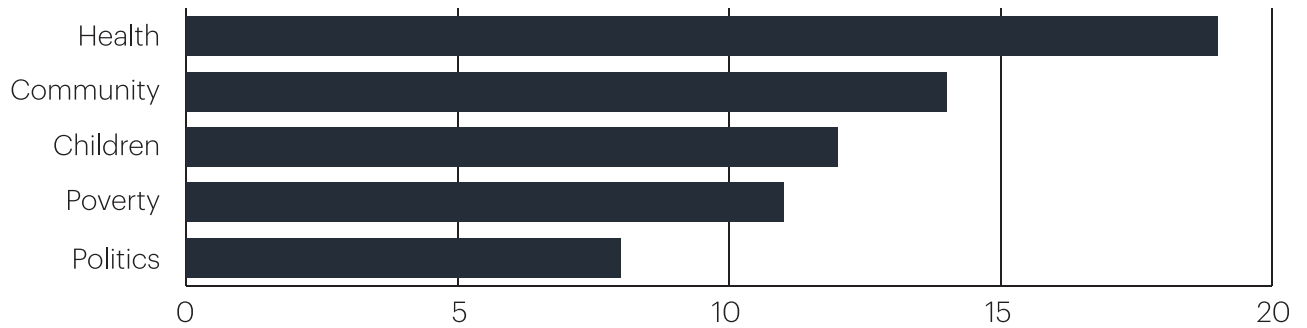
Topics were assigned to mentions using an automated algorithm, and mentions could have more than one topic. For example, a commercial urging donations for a children’s hospital would be categorized as both “children” and “health.”

**Across all three giving periods, the top five topics associated with charitable giving impressions were health, community (such as local charities), children, poverty, and politics.**

- Children were the most common topic during the Giving Season, followed by health, poverty, politics, and education.
- Politics entered the top three during the normative period, in part due to the Presidential primary contests. Giving mentions related to politics included men-

---

## PERCENT OF IMPRESSIONS ASSOCIATED WITH TOP 5 CHARITABLE GIVING TOPICS



tions of political fundraising and mentions of the philanthropic activities of political candidates. For example, Presidential candidate Tom Steyer mentioned the “Giving Pledge” in many of his campaign commercials.

- The bottom tier of topics included stories about the environment, religion, disaster relief, the arts, the trustworthiness of charities, and human rights, all of which were under 5%.

### **COVID-19**

---

#### **The emerging impact of the Coronavirus on charitable giving discourse was evident from the beginning of the pandemic.**

- Even though the virus was just getting started in the U.S. during the normative period of February and early March, 5% of charitable impressions directly mentioned terms directly related to Coronavirus.
- The actual COVID-19 period of data collection started at the end of April, when the U.S. had experienced 50,000 COVID-related deaths. The virus was directly mentioned in 15% of charitable giving mentions.

The entire COVID-19 period illustrates how charitable giving representations reflected a country navigating a new reality. Health mentions were inflated by the pandemic, community mentions were about the impact of the virus on local areas, poverty mentions featured stories on unprecedented unemployment claims, and children and education were highlighted through discussions of school closings.

### **BLACK LIVES MATTER**

---

#### **In response to the protests following the killing of George Floyd, we examined coverage of Black Lives Matter during the COVID-19 period, which concluded 11 days later. While the Black Lives Matter movement garnered significant TV news coverage during this time, this coverage largely did not include references to charitable giving or donations.**

- During the COVID-19 period, only 1% of charitable giving mentions were related to human rights — which includes references to the Black Lives Matter movement.
- News coverage of the initial wave of Black Lives Matter protests included occasional mentions of the Minnesota Freedom Fund and other ways to bail out arrested protesters.

---

# ■ CHARITABLE GIVING IN SCRIPTED ENTERTAINMENT

## INTRODUCTION

<sup>10</sup> Note: In this report, “episode” is used to describe all content, including television episodes and films.

The results of our audience survey demonstrated that both planned and responsive givers are heavy consumers of scripted TV. We know from 20 years of Lear Center research that scripted storytelling in TV and film can have a powerful impact on audiences’ knowledge, attitudes and behavior. Thus, it is important to understand the nature of the stories about charitable giving that are conveyed to potential donors through scripted entertainment. To answer this question, we conducted a historical analysis of charitable giving depictions in over 87,000 scripted television and film episodes from January 2008 to August 2019, applying the same set of twelve keywords we used for the television analysis.<sup>10</sup> After removing references not relevant to charitable giving, such as references to characters named Charity, we were left with 25,627 mentions of charitable giving in 15,392 episodes.

## MENTIONS BY KEYWORD

We began by analyzing the frequency of each group of keywords in the full sample of 25,627 charitable giving keyword mentions.

### **“Charity” and “donation” were the most frequently referenced keywords in scripted entertainment.**

- “Charity” or “charities” was mentioned 9,368 times in 5,361 scripts.
- “Donate” or “donation” was said 8,422 times in 5,273 scripts, and “donor” appeared 4,314 times in 2,233 scripts. These include many references to organ, tissue, blood, and reproductive donations, which are popular storylines in medical shows and police procedurals alike.
- There were 2,237 instances of “fundraiser” or “fundraising” in 1,419 scripts.
- There were only 376 mentions of “philanthropy” or “philanthropist” that appeared in 330 scripts, and there were only 13 instances of “charitable giving.”

## IN-DEPTH CONTENT ANALYSIS SAMPLE

To further understand the context of these charitable giving mentions, we conducted an in-depth content analysis on a subset of 170 scripted television episodes and films.

We were interested in substantial storylines about monetary charitable giving in

11. See detailed methodology report for additional inclusion criteria. [https://www.mediaimpactproject.org/uploads/5/1/2/7/5127770/GatesGiving\\_DetailedMethodology.pdf](https://www.mediaimpactproject.org/uploads/5/1/2/7/5127770/GatesGiving_DetailedMethodology.pdf)
12. Unless otherwise indicated, all results are reported at the episode level. Whether a variable occurred once or multiple times in an episode, it was counted only as present in the episode. For example, if ten people give a donation in an episode, that episode is counted as having an act of giving.

highly viewed TV shows and films. Thus, content with only political donation or fundraiser storylines and those about organ donation (or blood, tissue, or reproductive donations) were excluded from the sample. To be considered a substantial storyline television episodes were required to have at least five charitable giving mentions, and films were required to have at least three. Finally, to make sure we were examining highly viewed content, television shows were required to average at least 1 million viewers per episode and films had to have been released either in U.S. movie theaters or on Netflix.<sup>11</sup>

A team of 12 coders was rigorously trained to analyze the content, with 20% of episodes double-coded for interrater reliability.<sup>12</sup>

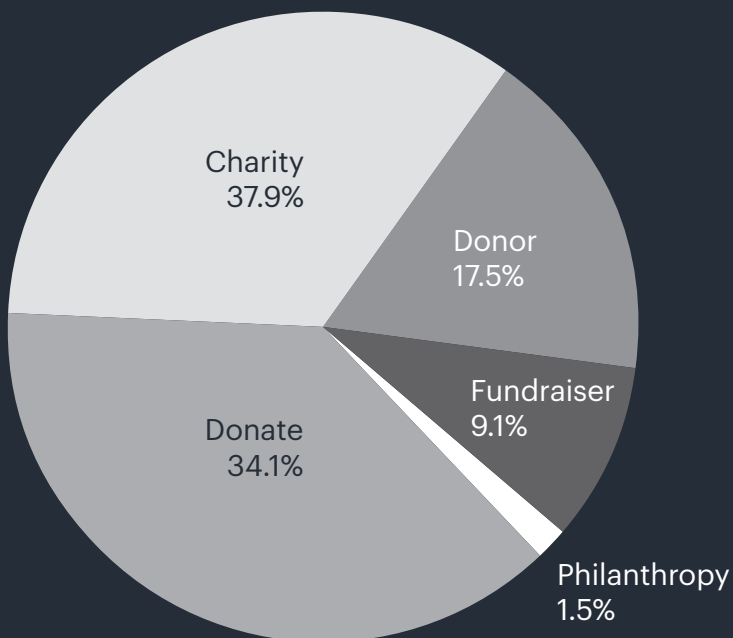
## OVERVIEW OF GIVING IN ENTERTAINMENT

### GENRE AND SUBGENRE

**Charitable giving appears in many different types of scripted programming, from horror movies to animated children’s shows and sitcoms.**

- The majority of “episodes” were TV episodes (82%). Eighteen percent were films.
- Over half of all episodes (51%) were dramas, 33% were comedies, and 16% were children’s programming. Among the dramas, 38% were police procedurals.
- Because storylines focused on organ, tissue, blood, or reproductive donations were excluded from the analysis, only 7% percent of dramas were medical shows.

### CHARITABLE GIVING VIEWS BY KEYWORD



### PROMINENCE

**The majority of giving storylines were central to the overall episode storyline and carried throughout the episode.**

- Most giving storylines spanned the whole episode (78%), but 22% were limited to one individual scene.
- Most depictions of giving were central to the main storyline in the episode (72%), with 28% considered incidental.

**One of the key recommendations that emerged from our expert interviews was for content creators to focus on the “long game” in storytelling. Rather than telling a one-off story, look at the**

---

**issue over multiple episodes and show the impact that giving dollars or time can make.**

- We identified only 6% of giving storylines that appeared to carry over into additional episodes. Occasionally, however, storylines provided viewers with an opportunity to see the long game.
- On *Insecure*, Issa Dee, works for a nonprofit and plans a fundraising event across multiple episodes.

## **FRAMING**

---

Episodic frames are those that place responsibility for social problems on those most in need, often focusing on individual actions. Conversely, thematic frames treat social problems as a consequence of larger structural or systemic inequities.<sup>13</sup> Research shows that thematic framing promotes external attributions of responsibility, wherein blame is focused on the system rather than the individual. External attributions are associated with public support for systemic policy changes.<sup>14</sup>

**Charitable giving depictions rarely addressed systemic causes or solutions to social problems, instead focusing largely on individuals.**

- Forty-three percent of episodes demonstrated episodic framing with responsibility focused on the individual, such as teachers raising money for a student's heart transplant on *Those Who Can't* and donations of items to an immigrant family on *Kim's Convenience*.
- Sixteen percent of episodes demonstrated thematic framing with a focus on larger systemic responsibility. For example, in *New Amsterdam*, the new medical director is supposed to appeal to philanthropists at a hospital fundraiser with a story about an individual patient, but instead he spends the episode showing how they can put patients first and how the money they raise can be used to make things better for all patients.

**A key finding that emerged from our landscape analysis and expert interviews was the effectiveness of charitable appeals that localize an issue. Even global problems can be reframed to emphasize the impact on local communities.**

- Six out of ten episodes focused on local organizations and causes, while only 19% addressed international ones.

**Relatively few episodes had characters who exhibited empathy for the beneficiaries of giving or showed the impact of donations.**

- Only a quarter of episodes included a character who demonstrated empathy for the beneficiaries of their donation. For example, in *Barbershop: The Next Cut*, the Barbershop offers free haircuts to the community to bring a cease fire to gang violence because they are deeply concerned about the safety of the

13. Kim, S. H., Carvalho, J. P., & Davis, A. C. (2010). Talking about poverty: News framing of who is responsible for causing and fixing the problem. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 87(3-4), 563-581. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769901008700308>.

14. Applebaum, L. D. (2001). The influence of perceived deservingness on policy decisions regarding aid to the poor. *Political Psychology*, 22(3), 419-442. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0162-895X.00248>

---

community. *The House Bunny*, Shelley empathizes with people living in the nursing home because she previously lived away from her family.

- Similarly, only 24% of episodes demonstrated the impact of an act of giving on the intended beneficiaries. For example, in *NCIS*, Nicholas Torres gets to see children with disabilities enjoying the accessible playground that he donated to, and in *The Accountant*, an autistic child is shown being able to communicate because a special computer was donated to her.

## HOW IS THE ACT OF GIVING PORTRAYED?

Research shows people are more likely to engage in behaviors they see modeled by others, including fictional characters with whom they have come to identify.<sup>15</sup>

### NATURE AND CONTEXT OF GIVING BEHAVIOR

**Three out of four episodes portrayed an act of charitable giving to a specific organization named in the episode, and more than half of these involved giving by a main character.**

- There was an act of charitable giving in 126 episodes (74%).
- Of those episodes with an act of charitable giving, 59% of episodes portrayed giving by a main character.
- A specific charitable organization was named in 75% of all episodes, and 15% of all episodes identified a real-life charitable organization.
- Money was given to charity in two-thirds of all episodes (67%) that included an act of giving. Others involved the donation of items (17%) or time (16%).

**Our audience survey found about 39% of people are Responsive Givers, who do most of their giving in response to a need or an ask. However, responsive giving was more likely to be depicted than planned giving.**

- Eighty-two percent of episodes with an act of giving involved responsive giving — for example, responding to a natural disaster or emergency, a direct ask, someone in need, or being moved to give unexpectedly at a fundraiser
- Only 25% of episodes with an act of giving portrayed planned giving, such as a monthly or annual donation, or religious tithing. Some episodes had both planned giving and responsive giving
- The charitable causes depicted in all scripted entertainment largely mirrored the topics from our television analysis: 43% were about children, 33% health, 22% community issues, 17% poverty, and 16% education.

**Giving was depicted in a variety of contexts, including workplaces, homes, schools, and religious venues.**

- Forty-one percent of episodes with an act of giving portrayed giving in fundrais-

15. Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action*. Prentice Hall.; Bandura, A. (2008). Observational learning. *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*. W. Donsbach (Ed.). <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405186407.wbieco004>

ing events.

- Nineteen percent of episodes with an act of giving portrayed giving in the workplace. These included an episode of *The Office* in which the office mates discuss where to direct corporate social responsibility donations, and an episode of *NCIS* where several coworkers donate to their colleague's fundraiser for an accessible playground.
- Beyond the workplace, 18% of episodes with an act of giving portrayed giving the home, 12% in a school, and 6% in a religious venue.

## ONLINE GIVING AND CROWDFUNDING

**One in ten episodes showed online giving, which is in line with the 8.5% of real-life donations that are submitted online.**<sup>16</sup>

- Examples of online giving included an iPad screen that revealed a \$1,000 online donation from a college student in *Grown-ish*, Walter White receiving online donations on a desktop computer in *Breaking Bad*, and Nicholas Torres from *NCIS* omitting a decimal point in an online donation to a coworker's accessible playground charity, which turned a \$50 donation into a \$5,000 donation.

In our expert interviews, Ben Soskis of the Urban Institute talked about the dramatic and performative nature of charitable crowdfunding and how it could be perfect fodder for narrative storytelling. He said "There's clear evidence that the people who have the best stories get funded."

**However, crowdfunding is largely invisible in scripted entertainment.**

- We only found one episode with a depiction of crowdfunding, on *South Park*.
- However, Hollywood is beginning to take notice. A 2020 episode of *New Amsterdam* (which was not part of our sample) did a deep dive into the prevalence of crowdfunding healthcare and the pressure to build a compelling emotional case for donors.

## ARE CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS CORRUPT?

Our landscape analysis found that in general, nonprofits are perceived positively by the public. However, public perceptions can be temporarily tarnished by negative press, such as coverage of the American Red Cross response to 9/11. Based on our expert interviews, we wanted to understand how discussions of excessive overhead, as well as more serious allegations like fraud or corruption are depicted.

**The majority of episodes presented an overall positive or neutral picture of charitable giving.**

- Thirty-two percent of giving episodes conveyed a positive sentiment toward

<sup>16</sup> Philanthropy News Digest. (2019, February 22). *Online giving increased 1.2 percent in 2018, report finds*. PND. <https://philanthropynewsdigest.org/news/online-giving-increased-1.2-percent-in-2018-report-finds>

---

giving, while 44% were mixed or neutral and 23% were negative.

- If depictions focused on illegal activity or corruption, they were automatically designated as negative and if the episode displayed sincere generosity and it focused on the beneficial aspects of giving, it was deemed positive.

In our audience survey, we found that givers were largely satisfied with their giving experiences, but would be more satisfied if they had a better understanding of how their contributions were used, so we wanted to see what narratives about overhead and indirect expenses viewers consume in scripted entertainment.

**In scripted entertainment, discussions of overhead were infrequent, but notable in their criticism.**

- Discussions of charity overhead, indirect expenses, and administrative costs occurred in 8% of episodes.
- A particularly critical depiction appeared in the animated children’s show *The Amazing World of Gumball*: “*The TV campaign raised over \$3 Million. Hooray! So, after paying for the offices, the media budget, and the salaries for our advisors, we’re left with \$12.30 to spend on actual charitable deeds. [Clears throat] Oh, sorry — \$5.29.*”
- In *Parks & Recreation*, Ben Wyatt takes over the Sweetums Foundation in an attempt to change the corrupt company image by doing good in the community. The foundation offices are filled with luxury items — expensive oil paintings, “*more mahogany wood... than in the Amazon,*” expensive food and alcohol, robes, and massages. As they try to figure out which charities to fund, Andy Dwyer says, “*imagine all the money you could save [and donate to other charities] if you didn’t have to pay for all this expensive stuff.*”

**Numerous episodes went beyond excessive overhead to include depictions of charitable organizations involved in corruption, fraud, or other impropriety.**

- Over one-quarter (26%) of all charitable giving episodes were associated with corruption, impropriety, quid pro quo, fraud, or some kind of illegal activity.
- In dramas, fully one-third of giving episodes featured corruption. Charities were commonly depicted as fronts for nefarious activities.
- Depictions of charity corruption were particularly prevalent in police procedurals and crime-focused series. These included financial crimes such as charity representatives embezzling donations on *Blue Bloods*, *NCIS: New Orleans*, and *Lucifer*, and a money laundering scam masquerading as a charity for Haitian orphans on *Person of Interest*. Other shows portrayed charities being involved in even more nefarious activities, such as serving as fronts for terrorist organizations on *NUMB3RS*, *Madam Secretary*, and the spy thriller film *A Most Wanted Man*.
- Even in comedies, 20% of comedy episodes included references to corruption or illegal activity, including a *Veep* storyline about funneling millions of dollars from an AIDS foundation to Selina Meyer’s presidential library. Popular comedies such as *The Office* and *South Park* also featured jokes about charities being associated with terrorism.



---

**Fully ten percent of episodes involved a fake charity invented by characters for their own selfish purposes.**

- Fake charities primarily appeared in comedy programming as an off-the-cuff method of misdirection.
- In *Santa Clarita Diet*, Drew Barrymore’s character makes up a fake charity to end blindness.
- On *Schitt’s Creek*, a fake fundraiser for a cleft palate children’s charity is invented to disguise a surprise birthday party.
- In the movie *Sex Tape*, Cameron Diaz and Jason Segel make up a charity for British orphans with oversized kidneys.
- In *Black-ish*, Tyra Banks guest stars as a pop star, who makes up a fake charity concert to trick her friends into watching her baby so she can have a night of rest.

## IS CHARITY ONLY FOR THE RICH AND FAMOUS?

In scripted entertainment, charity can be used as a dramatic tool to signal wealth or the moral code of a character. In *Crazy Rich Asians*, one mention of Araminta Lee’s charitable giving immediately conveys to viewers that she is both rich and a good person. Charity can be used as thematic subtext to identify characters with wealth, power and influence. In our expert interviews, GivingTuesday CEO Asha Curran suggested philanthropy is often framed as “a rich people thing,” an institution for the wealthy, with characters featured at posh charity galas and on philanthropic boards.

**Our research suggests, however, that portrayals of charitable giving are considerably more nuanced. Although philanthropy among the wealthy received a lot of attention, giving was not depicted as only for rich people.**

- Of 126 episodes with an act of giving, more featured non-wealthy donors (48%) than wealthy ones (42%).<sup>17</sup>

**Fundraisers and charity galas are often considered playgrounds for the rich, but our analysis found just as many informal fundraising events as formal ones.**

- Over half (52%) of episodes depicted some type of fundraising event.
- Of the episodes with fundraising events:
  - Fifty percent of episodes depicted fundraising events where people were wearing formal black tie or semi-formal cocktail party attire.
  - Fifty percent of episodes featured fundraising events with people in informal (43%) or office attire (7%).
  - Fifty-seven percent of episodes represented fundraising events with predominantly white attendees, 40% had a racially diverse group of attendees,

17. In each episode that depicted an act of giving, we noted whether at least one donor of particular demographic characteristics (e.g., socioeconomic status, race, age) was depicted. This is not a tally of all donors; if there was at least one instance of a rich donor in the episode and at least one instance of a non-rich donor in the episode, it was counted for both.

---

and 4% had predominantly Black attendees.

- Fundraisers were most frequently held in banquet halls (16%), outdoor venues (15%), at a school (13%), or a private residence (10%).

Vince Stehle, CEO of Media Impact Funders, noted that such depictions of charity are “examples of how wealthy people use philanthropy for their own advantage, which is a growing critique of philanthropy, that it is an instrument of their privilege and an extension of their power, and not an authentically altruistic act.”

**While there were certainly examples of wealthy people using philanthropy as an instrument of power, there were also depictions of rich donors using their wealth to make the world better.**

- In *Billions*, billionaire Bobby Axelrod donates millions of dollars to get his name on a building purely to take revenge on someone who wronged him as a teenager.
- On the other hand, an entire 2009 series called *The Philanthropist* followed a billionaire reformed playboy who sees the good his money can create in the world. The show was a limited series that was canceled after 8 episodes.

Celebrity voices can bring attention to a particular issue or cause, as we have seen with The Oprah Effect in unscripted programming

**Celebrity references were also prominent in scripted entertainment, including both real-world celebrities and characters who are identified as celebrities within the show.**

- Forty percent of episodes mentioned a celebrity in relation to charitable giving. These ranged from brief mentions to substantial celebrity involvement. For example, NBA superstar Anthony Davis helps bring attention to an event focused on reducing gang violence in *Barbershop 2: The Next Cut*.
- The comedy *Difficult People* provides comic commentary on the role of celebrities in causes when the two fame-hungry main characters invent “the toilet hand challenge.” They present this as the next Ice Bucket Challenge and encourage celebrities like Nathan Lane and Bernie Madoff to make it go viral.

18. Helen, T. (2013, March 8). Friends - A selfless good deed [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DowJfUmlzel>

19. Oliver, J. (2013, February 6). Don't Curb Your Enthusiasm when it comes to donor recognition. Bloomerang. <https://bloomerang.co/blog/dont-curb-your-enthusiasm-when-it-comes-to-donor-recognition/>

## DONOR & BENEFICIARY CHARACTERISTICS

### DONOR MOTIVATIONS

- Two television episodes that predate our sample illustrated the difficulties of evaluating motivations for giving. A 1998 *Friends* episode featured a philosophical debate between Joey and Phoebe about whether truly selfless good deeds exist, or if all giving is selfish.<sup>18</sup> In 2007, an episode of *Curb Your Enthusiasm* debated whether or not anonymous donations were self-serving.<sup>19</sup>

---

**Depicted motivations for giving were complex. Some episodes included examples of both selfless and self-interested motivations. In some cases, the same giving act was depicted as having different motivations at different points in the same episode.**

- Nearly half (49%) of episodes depicted selfless motivations for giving, including giving out of sincerity, generosity, compassion, altruism, goodwill, or a desire to be helpful. For example, Dre gives his clothes to a man who is experiencing homelessness on *Black-ish*, a woman reallocates her wedding dress fund to buy a year's worth of insulin for her friend's child on *Blue Bloods*, and in the movie *Invictus*, Nelson Mandela recognizes that his salary is too high, so he donates one-third of his monthly income to charity.
- Four in ten episodes depicted self-interested motivations, such as donating due to social pressure, guilt, shame, personal benefit, fear, anger, duress, self-recognition, or other insincere motives. In *30 Rock*, Jenna Maroney tries to donate her hair to charity for the media attention it would bring her. In *Billions*, Axe Capital creates a charity drive purely to look good to investors, and in *The Help*, one auction donation is made just to get a mink coat and another is made to get revenge. Any donations related to crime, quid pro quo, or illegal activities were automatically designated as self-interested motivations.

## **DONOR RACE**

**A substantial proportion of episodes with an act of giving depicted donors of color, largely in shows with non-white casts.**

- Sixty-nine percent of episodes with an act of giving represented at least one white donor. Black donors were depicted in 17% of episodes with a giving act. Only 8% of giving episodes portrayed a Latinx donor and 6% featured an Asian/Pacific Islander donor.
- Most donors of color appeared in shows with predominantly non-white casts like *Kim's Convenience*, *Lopez*, *Insecure*, *Black-ish*, *Grown-ish*, and the film *Dear White People*.

## **YOUNG DONORS**

Our expert interviews revealed that younger demographics may be overlooked by larger charity organizations. These younger donors tend to give through peer-to-peer giving platforms (Kiva, GoFundMe, Facebook Fundraising) more than older demographics.

**In scripted entertainment, young donors were not completely invisible, but there is room for improvement.**

- In episodes that included an act of giving, 13% depicted at least one donor who appeared to be under the age of 18, and 13% included at least one young adult donor between 18 and 30 years old.
- In comparison, 52% of episodes with an act of giving showed at least one donor who appeared to be between 31 and 50 years old, and 24% included at least one donor who appeared to be over 50.
- Young donors in animated children's programming typically were shown donating items

---

as an introduction to the concept of charity. For example, in *Phineas & Ferb*, a young girl donated her old toys to an organization called “Charitable Charities.”

- Teenage donors were shown donating items like instruments in *Austin & Ally*, and baseball cards in *The Big C*. Young donors also were shown donating small amounts of money to food drives, bake sales, and a school club that aims to end hunger.
- Depictions of young adult donors included storylines about non-wealthy young people like Issa Dee’s friends donating to her nonprofit’s charity event on *Insecure* and college sorority sisters donating their calendar proceeds in the film *House Bunny*.
- At the same time, charitable giving was presented as a typical part of life for the young and wealthy, such as *Carmen Sandiego* bidding on a red sports car at a charity auction, the philanthropy of affluent characters on *Melrose Place*, and Christian Grey in the *Fifty Shades* movies.

## BENEFICIARIES OF CHARITABLE GIVING

---

A key recommendation that emerged from our expert interviews was for content creators to give space to those receiving charity, allowing them to tell their own story rather than limiting storytellers to those with wealth and power.<sup>20</sup>

**Our examination of beneficiaries in charitable giving storylines supports this recommendation. Whereas three quarters of all episodes depicted donors, beneficiaries were only included in about one-third.**

- Thirty-five percent of episodes showed a beneficiary of charity. These ranged from substantial depictions like a man experiencing homelessness on *Black-ish*, who explained what it is like to live on the streets, to visual depictions like children with disabilities enjoying a new accessible playground on *NCIS*.

**When beneficiaries were depicted, they represented substantial diversity.<sup>21</sup>**

- Fifty-three percent of beneficiary episodes had white beneficiaries, 28% depicted Black beneficiaries, 8% had Latinx, and 4% Asian/Pacific Islander beneficiaries.
- Thirty-seven percent of episodes depicted beneficiaries under the age of 18 and an equal number had beneficiaries aged 31-50.
- Twenty-three percent of episodes depicted at least one beneficiary who appeared to be poor and almost twice as many (45%) depicted at least one who did not appear to be poor.

**Despite this diversity, the perspectives of beneficiaries were rarely acknowledged.**

- Charitable giving depictions focused primarily on beneficiaries in only 6% of

20. Jauriqui, V. (2019). *Charitable giving in mass media: Interviews with key stakeholders*. USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center. [https://www.mediaimpactproject.org/uploads/5/1/2/7/5127770/charitablegiving\\_stakeholderinterviews.pdf](https://www.mediaimpactproject.org/uploads/5/1/2/7/5127770/charitablegiving_stakeholderinterviews.pdf)

21. As with donors, in each episode that depicted an act of giving, we noted whether at least one beneficiary of a given race or ethnicity was depicted. This is not a tally of all beneficiaries; whether there was one Latinx beneficiary in an episode or 10 Latinx beneficiaries, we simply noted that the episode contained at least one Latinx beneficiary.

---

episodes. The focus was more typically on charity representatives (44%) or on donors (39%).

- Beneficiaries only were able to tell part of their perspective in 19% of all episodes — and 53% of episodes that show a beneficiary. For example, in *Black-ish*, a man experiencing homelessness explains his situation to Dre.