



# CHARITABLE GIVING IN THE USA 2019

An overview of  
individual giving  
in the USA

March 2019

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# FOREWORD


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## About this report

The spirit of giving has been alive and well since the early days of the United States, when French scholar Alexis de Tocqueville famously noted that Americans had a cultural inclination to create voluntary associations founded on principles of giving. A thriving civil society has always been a bedrock of American culture, and I am especially thrilled to highlight the impressive number of people that report taking part in a charitable activity during the last year – 70% of the population (an eight percentage point increase compared to 2017).

As an organization committed to enabling domestic and international philanthropy, we are inspired and reassured to know that the majority of Americans believe in the positive impact charities have on their local communities, on the USA as a whole, as well as internationally. It is striking that more than six in ten – 62% of Americans – donated money to a charitable cause in the past year supporting a variety of causes and organizations, from animal welfare groups to religious organizations, organizations helping the poor, and colleges and universities.

The spirit of giving is here to stay in the United States, and even on the rise!



Ted Hart ACFRE, CAP®  
President & CEO  
CAF America

## About CAF America

CAF America is a global grantmaking organization assisting corporations, foundations and individuals with their philanthropic strategies. With offices in Washington, D.C., San Francisco, Toronto, and Vancouver we streamline the grantmaking process to eliminate risk and administrative burden, and help donors support great causes through strategic, effective and tax-advantaged international and domestic grants.

Working with colleagues at our head office in London, CAF America can offer The CAF American Donor Fund, a giving solution for individuals and companies that pay tax in both the USA and UK. The CAF American Donor Fund allows donors to achieve greater impact with their philanthropy by helping to claim the maximum reliefs available in both countries.

In the last 5 years alone, CAF America has granted more than \$532 million in donor funds to more than 4,000 charitable organizations in over 110 countries.

# PREFACE

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This Charitable Giving in the USA 2019 report is one of an international series, produced across the CAF Global Alliance, a world-leading network of organizations working at the forefront of philanthropy and civil society. The series also includes reports covering Australia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, India, Russia, South Africa and the UK.

This is the second edition of this unique collection of country reports. As the series grows we will be able to look at trends in giving for the first time: why and how people of different ages and social groups give in different countries, the way they give, and who they give to, as well as gaining a better understanding of people's participation in social and civic activities beyond financial donations and volunteering.

We hope this suite of reports will give us a greater understanding than ever before of the different ways in which people give and the lessons we can all learn from giving in different parts of the world.



**Michael Mapstone**  
Director of International  
CAF Global Alliance

## About CAF

CAF (Charities Aid Foundation) is a leading international charity registered in the United Kingdom. We exist to make giving go further, so together we can transform more lives and communities around the world. We are a champion for better giving, and for over 90 years we've been helping donors, companies, charities and social organizations make a bigger impact.

**We are CAF and we make giving count.**

# KEY FINDINGS

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Our analysis provides these key findings for individual giving in the USA:

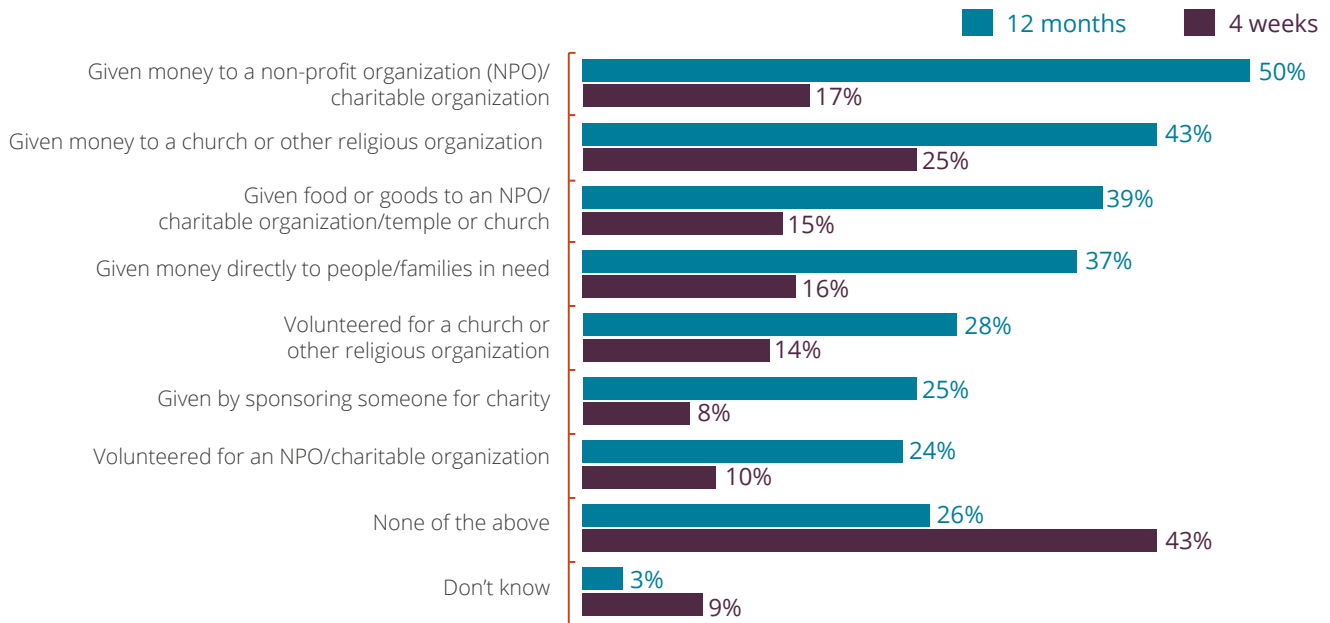
- Compared to 2017, more people in this year's survey report taking part in charitable activity during the last 12 months (70%, up from 62% in 2017).
- More than six in ten (62%) Americans gave money in the last 12 months, either by donating to a charity, by giving to a church/religious organization, or by sponsoring someone. This is also significantly higher than the level in 2017, when we reported that 55% had done so.
- Those aged 55 years and over are the most likely to have done any of the charitable activities, especially in terms of donating or sponsoring someone, both in the last four weeks and in the last 12 months.
- Religious organizations remain the most popular cause to donate to in America (38%).
- The median amount donated or sponsored in the last year is \$100, remaining consistent since 2017.
- Giving using cash and also, online using a bank or credit card are the most popular methods of donation (both 39%).
- More than a third (35%) have volunteered in the last year, up from 31% in 2017. Religious organizations/churches are again the most popular cause (36%) in which to volunteer.
- The majority of Americans believe that charities have had a positive impact on their local communities, on the USA as a whole, and internationally.
- Having more money themselves is the thing most likely to encourage Americans to donate more in the coming 12 months, remaining unchanged since 2017 (47%).

# DETAILED FINDINGS

## 1.0 Overall picture of how people get involved

All those interviewed were shown a list of seven activities and asked whether they had done any of these in the last 12 months, and in the last four weeks.

**Figure 1: Which, if any, of the following have you done in the last 12 months/four weeks?**



Base: All adults aged 18+ (n=1,193)

More people in this year's survey report doing at least one of the charitable activities listed – seven in ten said that they did so, up from 62% in 2017. Giving money to a church or other religious organizations, and giving food or goods to a charity/foundation/church are the two activities mainly responsible for driving the overall increase. Those saying they did at least one of the activities in the last four weeks has also increased since 2017, up from 43% to 47% this year.

As was the case in 2017, those aged 55 and over are the most likely age group to have done any of the activities listed, both in the last 12 months (76%) and in the last four weeks (55%). Those with family incomes over \$80,000 a year also continue to be more likely to have done any of the activities in the last 12 months (83%) and the last four weeks (62%).

## 2.0 How people get involved – detail

### 2.1 Giving money

Six in ten (62%) report giving money in the last 12 months, through a combination of donating to a charity/NPO (50%), by giving to a church or other religious organizations (43%), or by sponsoring someone for a charity (25%). Nearly half (47%) have given money in at least one of these ways in the last four weeks; a quarter (25%) by giving to a religious organization, 17% by giving money to an NPO/charity, and 8% through sponsoring someone.

The proportion of people donating or sponsoring someone has increased since 2017, both in the last 12 months (up from 55%) and in the last four weeks (up from 35%).

Those aged 55 years and over are more likely than other age groups to have donated or sponsored someone over the last 12 months (68% versus a low of 53% of 18-24 year olds and 61% of 35-44 year olds). In terms of income, those with a family income of more than \$80,000 a year are most likely to give money (74% compared to 53% of those with a family income of under \$40,000).



### 2.2 Volunteering

Over a third (35%) have volunteered in the last 12 months, up from 31% in 2017. 28% did so for a religious organization and 24% for an NPO/charity – a number of people therefore volunteered for both. The proportion who report volunteering in the last four weeks has also increased since 2017, up to 20% from 17%.

As with donating money, those with higher annual family incomes are more likely to have volunteered in the last 12 months (45% of those with an annual income of \$80,000 or above, compared to 32% of those with less than \$40,000).

The top five causes for volunteering remain largely the same as last year. Volunteers are most likely to give their time to support religious organizations (36%), helping the poor (21%), and supporting older people, homeless people, and children (all 13%). The causes with the lowest levels of volunteering amongst Americans are overseas aid (2%), anti-corruption initiatives, women's rights, supporting medical institutions, and preservation of cultural heritage (all 3%).

Men are more likely than women to have supported a range of causes through volunteering, including helping the poor (28% vs. 15%), supporting children (17% vs. 9%), community development (10% vs. 2%), fighting drug addiction (9% vs. 1%), physical healthcare (8% vs. 2%), human rights protection (8% vs. 2%), mental healthcare (7% vs. 2%), and supporting scientific research (6% vs. 1%).



### 3.0 Typical amount given

Those surveyed were asked how much money they had given either in the past 12 months, or in the past 4 weeks.

Amongst those who had not donated or sponsored in the last four weeks, but had done so in the past 12 months, the typical (median) total amount given over the period was \$100. The average (mean) donation was \$461. The median donation from the last 12 months has remained consistent since 2017, but the mean has risen from \$382, indicating that there have been some larger donations made this year alongside a rise in the proportion of Americans making a donation to charity.

Donations made in the last four weeks have seen the same trend, with the typical (median) donation remaining consistent with 2017 at \$100, while the average (mean) donation has increased from \$276 in 2017 to \$330 in 2018.

Both the typical (median) and average (mean) amount given over the last 4 weeks are higher among men (\$136 and \$417 respectively) than women (\$100 and \$233 respectively). This represents an increase in both the median and mean amounts given by men since 2017, while the amount donated by women has remained consistent year on year.





## 4.0 Which causes people give to

Supporting religious organizations/churches is the most popular cause in the USA, with 38% of American donors having given to this category. This is followed by helping the poor (34%) and supporting children, including orphans, seriously ill children and children with disabilities (23%). These are the same top causes as seen in 2017.

The proportion of Americans donating to disaster relief, including floods, terrorist attacks, and earthquakes, has risen, with 11% donating to this cause area in 2018 compared to 6% in 2017. This is likely due to the number of natural disasters we have seen in the last year, including Hurricanes Harvey and Maria striking mainland USA and Puerto Rico, both of which struck after the 2017 wave of research was conducted. Through other CAF research across the globe, we consistently see people's generosity in response to disasters and the desire to help those in need.

Women are more likely to have given to animal welfare (20% vs. 13% of men), while men are more likely to have given to disaster relief (14% vs. 9% of women), supporting schools, colleges and universities (11% vs. 6%), fighting drug addiction (8% vs. 3%), physical healthcare (7% vs. 3%), and mental healthcare (7% vs. 3%).

Those with a family income of over \$80,000 a year are more likely to donate to supporting schools, colleges and universities (51% vs. 8% average) and to supporting arts and culture (10% vs. 5% average).

**Figure 2:** Which of the following causes have you donated to/sponsored in the last 12 months/four weeks?



Base: All donors (n=746)

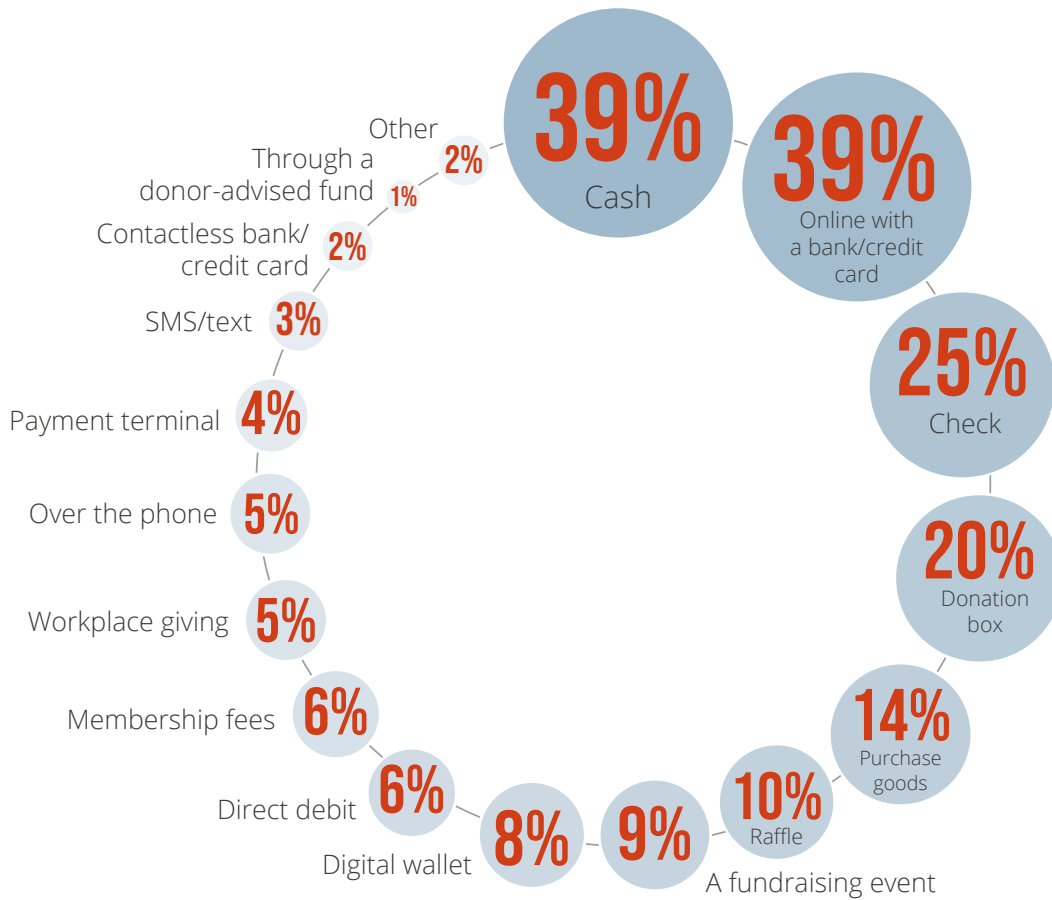
## 5.0 How people give

Giving using cash and online using a bank/credit card are the most common methods of donation (39% of donors respectively), followed by giving using a check (25%). Giving via text (3%), contactless card (2%) and through a donor-advised fund (1%) are very low methods of giving amongst those surveyed.

Men who donated are more likely to have done so over the phone with a bank card (6% vs. 3% of women), over a payment terminal (6% vs. 2%), and via text (5% vs. 2%). Women who donate are more likely to have used a donation box in a shop or public place (24% vs. 15% of men who donate).

Those aged 55 years and over (36%) and donors with a family annual income of \$80,000 or more (35%) are the most likely to have given using a check.

**Figure 3:** In the last 12 months/four weeks have you given to a cause by any of these methods?



Base: All donors (n=746)

## 6.0 Why people give

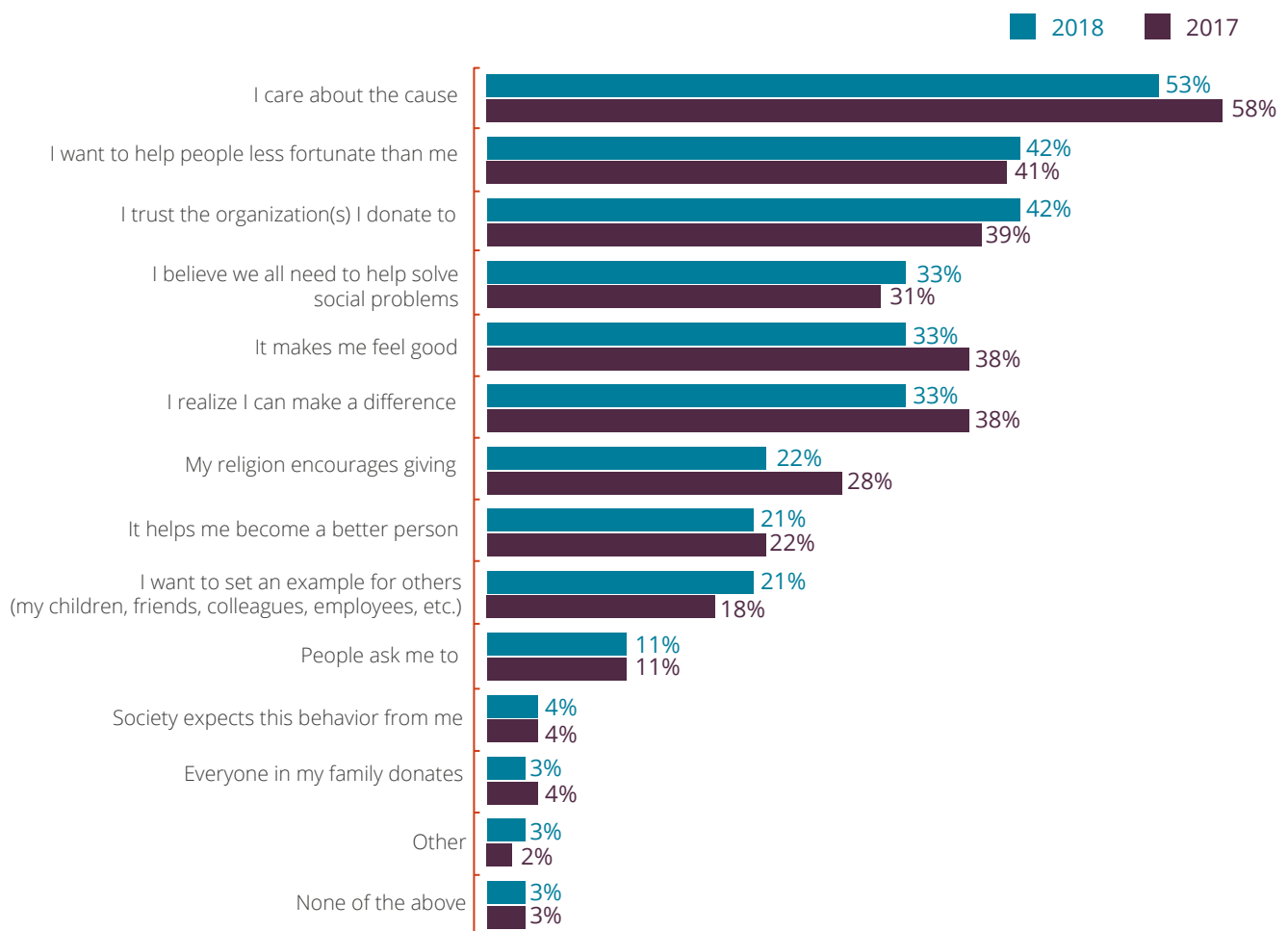
The top reasons for giving are unchanged from 2017. Caring about the cause is the most common reason for donating (53% of donors) followed by wanting to help those less fortunate (42%), trusting the organization they donate to (42%), believing we all need to help solve social problems (33%), making them feel good (33%), and realizing they can make a difference (33%).

Caring about the cause is a more common reason among those aged 55 years and over (59% compared to 43% of 18-24 year olds, who are the age group least likely to state this reason), while the youngest group are more likely than other age groups to donate because their family does so (11%).

Few donors cite their family or wider culture as reasons for giving. Less than one in 20 (4%) say that they donated because society expects this behavior, and a similar number (3%) say they did so because everyone in their family donates.



**Figure 4:** Which of the following, if any, are reasons that you have given money in the last 12 months/4 weeks?

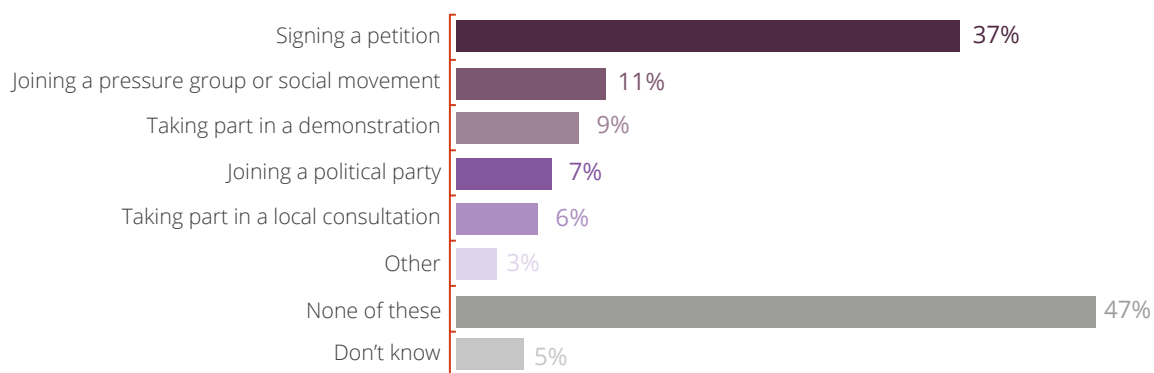


Base: All donors (n=746)

## 7.0 Engaging in civil society

This year we also asked about people's participation in other social and civic activities besides the giving already described earlier in the report. All those interviewed were shown a list of five activities and asked whether they had done any of these in the last 12 months.

**Figure 5:** In the last 12 months, have you been active in a political or social cause in any of the following ways?



Base: All adults aged 18+ (n=1,193)

Just under half (48%) of people surveyed have taken part in at least one of the social or civic activities listed. Men are more likely than women to say that they have taken part in any of the activities listed (51% vs. 45% of women), in particular a local consultation (9% vs. 3%).

Younger Americans are more likely to have joined a political party, with 15% of 18-24 year olds and 10% of 25-44 year olds, compared to 4% of the over 45 year olds. Younger people are also more likely to have taken part in a demonstration (12% aged 18-44 vs. 6% of 55 year olds and over).

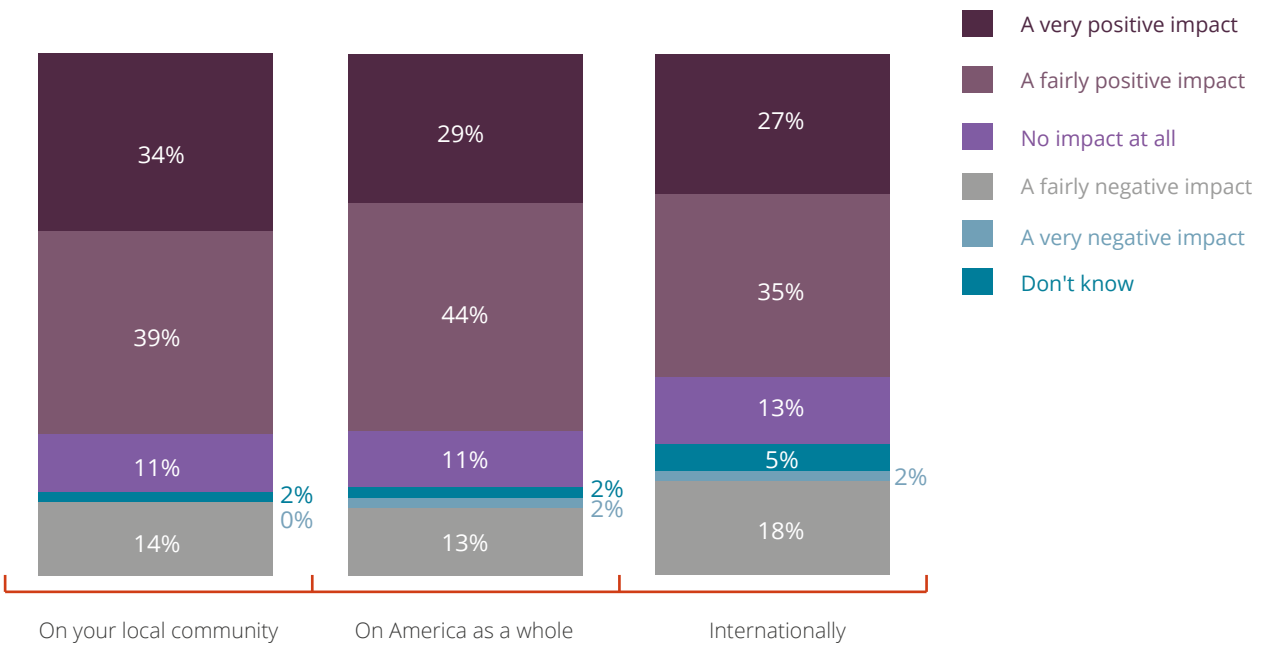


## 8.0 The impact of charities

Nearly three quarters (73%) of Americans say that charities have had a positive influence both on their local community and on America as a whole, but they are less sure of the impact around the world, with only three-fifths (62%) agreeing that charities have had a positive impact internationally. Very few people say that charities have had a negative impact on these areas.

Those with an annual household income of \$80,000 or more are more likely than those with an annual income of less than \$40,000 to perceive a positive impact from charities, on their local communities (83% vs. 68%); on America as a whole (81% vs. 69%), and internationally (70% vs. 55%).

**Figure 6: What impact, if any, do you think charities have had?**



Base: All adults aged 18+ (n=1,193)

## 9.0 Encouraging future giving

Having more money themselves is the most likely thing to encourage Americans to donate more in the coming 12 months, remaining unchanged from 2017, with nearly half (47%) saying this. Knowing for sure how their money would be spent remains the second top reason, seeing a significant increase to 40% from 35% in 2017. Eleven percent again said that nothing would make them increase their donating in the next 12 months.

Men are significantly more likely than women to say that more transparency in the charity sector would make them give more over the coming year (19% vs. 14%), while 18-24 year olds are more likely than all other ages to give if they had more money (60% vs. 47% average) and if they had better access to ways of making payments (25% vs. 7% average).

**47% WOULD DONATE MORE IF THEY HAD MORE MONEY**



**40% WOULD DONATE MORE IF THEY KNEW HOW THEIR MONEY WOULD BE SPENT**



# METHOD

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This report is based on data collected by YouGov on behalf of CAF.

In the USA, 1,193 interviews were completed online between 2 and 31 August 2018. The survey was conducted using YouGov's online panel.

The sample is nationally representative and is weighted to known population data on demographics including age, gender, and region.

Differences are reported at the 95% confidence level (the level of confidence that the results are a true reflection of the whole population). The maximum margin of error (the amount of random sampling error) is calculated as  $\pm 3\%$ .

# CAF Global Alliance

The CAF Global Alliance is a leading international network of independent, locally led organizations working at the forefront of philanthropy and civil society. It is a champion for better giving and civil society and harnesses local knowledge and expertise to help donors, companies and civil society make a bigger impact. Last year more than 70,000 charities received over £500m in donations in more than 100 countries.

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