There’s cause for celebration and concern in how Australians are giving to charity

Australians are famously giving people, but what are some of the issues surrounding charities in this country? You can see our infographic snapshot here, and follow our series Charities in Australia here.

Some 80.8% of adult Australians – 14.9 million of us – contributed financially to charities and non-profit organisations in 2015-16. At A$12.5 billion, total giving was well up from $4.7 billion a decade ago. The average donation of $764.08 was up too in real terms, by $210.16.

However, the percentage of people donating dipped from 87% over the same period. Annual data on tax-deductible donations tells a similar story, underlining the concern about a flatlining future for Australian charities if fewer people donate.

Trends emerging from the Giving Australia 2016 study, previewed last December, are cause for both celebration and concern.

Volunteers giving more

Some Australians are doubly generous, giving their time and their dollars. This link between volunteering and donating was clear in the Giving Australia research.

Those who both gave and volunteered donated nearly twice as much on average as givers who did not volunteer ($1,017.11 compared to $536.69).

An estimated 43.7% of Australians volunteered an average of 2.5 hours a week, and a median of 55 hours over the year. This was up from 44 hours in 2005.

Virtual volunteering is on the rise. Approximately half of all charities had a volunteer program offering virtual opportunities – with nearly two-thirds of this via mobile phone.

Larger businesses giving more

In 2015-16, businesses gave a total of $17.5 billion. This was made up of:

- $7.7 billion in community business partnerships (80% from large businesses);
- $6.2 billion in donations; and
- $3.6 billion in (non-commercial) sponsorships.

Even though they make up just 0.2% of Australian businesses, larger businesses were more likely to give, and in greater amounts. They now commonly report seeing their contribution to their surrounding communities as an ethical obligation.

‘Planner donors’ giving more

Some people give on the spur of the moment. This applies to roughly 60% of donors.

Others consider, plan and deliberate about their giving. Some sign up to give in a sustained way month by month. Others might sit with their children and plan what donations they will make as a family in the year ahead.
On average, these “planner donors” donate six times as much in a year as the impulse donor.

**Technology and social media bypassing some charities**

Technology and social media are increasing in both penetration and influence when it comes to charities. *Crowdfunding*, where people and their networks give directly to individuals and causes, has gathered momentum. This is part of a broader wave of direct citizen action.

In many cases, this results in charities being cut out of the giving process.

Technologically, the charitable sector runs the risk of being left behind. Nearly one-quarter of charities (23%) still do not have a website. Data security was a sector concern, as was the age profile and tech-savviness of non-profit leadership.

**Philanthropy – stable priorities but changing processes**

Nearly three-quarters (72.5%) of respondents to the survey of philanthropic foundations and philanthropists that was part of the study had not changed their preferred areas of giving in the past decade. These remained focused on social services, education and research, health, culture and recreation, and development and housing.

What has changed since 2005 are the processes of giving. Philanthropists and foundations are making greater use of initial expressions of interest and online technologies for applications and their review.

They are also proactively searching for non-profit organisations to fund, and increasing initial checks on non-profit organisations’ capacity to deliver.

**Collective giving momentum**

Group giving in its various guises has grown – whether as a family, school, workplace, or as one of the newer collective giving structures.

Examples of the new structures are giving circles – groups of people who pool their donations and decide together how to disburse them – like *Women and Change*, *Impact 100 Sydney North*, *Impact 100 Fremantle*, or popular dragons-den-style events such as *The Funding Network* and *10 x 10*.

Givers are interested in the chance to share common values and to bond with like-minded people that collective giving offers. They also like learning about different non-profit organisations and community needs, and being able to multiply the impact of their giving.

**What’s next?**

Giving comes in many forms. Australians have differing discretionary amounts of money, time and goods to donate, so people give according to their means.

The impact of giving is immense in more than dollar terms, both for the recipient and for the giver. But the decreasing giving participation rate is a concerning trend that needs to be monitored.

*You can catch up on other pieces in our Charities in Australia series [here](#).*