

# NATIONAL GIVING STUDY 2023



## ABOUT THE NATIONAL GIVING STUDY 2023

NVPC's Individual Giving Study has been conducted every two to three years since 2000, tracking trends in donation and volunteering across Singapore. In more recent years, the scope of the study has expanded to examine not only giving behaviours, but also the motivations and barriers that drive and hold back giving. Our 2018 and 2021 studies offered deeper insights into how to cultivate a caring, inclusive and compassionate society for the future of Singapore.

For our 2023 report, we have given the study a fresh new look, and a new name: the National Giving Study, reflecting the study's nationally representative results.

The 2023 National Giving Study presents an opportunity to identify trends in giving following the end of pandemic restrictions. With the growth of online giving platforms, informal community giving initiatives, and giving through social media, it also gives us a chance to take stock of how people in Singapore are engaging in new and innovative forms of giving. In summary, NGS 2023 delves into a diverse array of influences that shape the giving behaviours of people across Singapore.

## ABOUT NVPC

The National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre (NVPC) is the national agency dedicated to promoting a culture of giving in Singapore. By convening individuals, organisations, communities and leaders across the people, private and public sectors, we seek to create a more caring, inclusive, and compassionate society. Together, we envision Singapore as a City of Good, where everyone is able to give their time, talent, treasure, ties and testimony every day and everywhere.

Learn more at [www.cityofgood.sg](http://www.cityofgood.sg)

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2000, NVPC has tracked trends in Singapore's giving culture. Based on a nationally representative sample of 1,951 respondents, combined with focus groups conducted with 112 participants, the National Giving Study 2023 reports on the latest developments in how much, how often, and in what ways Singaporeans give, as well as what drives and holds back their giving behaviour.

The onset of the pandemic was accompanied by a drop in the proportion of people volunteering and donating, reflected in our 2021 survey. Since then, our findings show that the proportion of people volunteering has rebounded to around its 2018 level, and is now at 30%. The proportion of people donating, on the other hand, has not changed significantly since 2021, and is now at 62%.

Despite the recovery of volunteering and the stable proportion of people donating, we find that people are volunteering fewer hours and donating less money on average. Median hours volunteered decreased in each of the last three rounds of this study, declining from 24 hours in 2018 to 9.43 hours in 2023. Median amount donated increased from \$100 in 2018 to \$200 in 2021, but decreased again to \$100 in 2023.

These trends may reflect a feeling of financial and time pressures, as the global economic climate becomes more uncertain. We find that both perceived and actual financial constraints, as well as time constraints, were major barriers to giving. Young people in particular were sensitive to time constraints; and while older age groups volunteered more regularly and for longer periods of time, older people were also more likely to donate than the young. Thus, we suggest that economic pressures may be felt particularly acutely by younger age groups.

In response, younger Singaporeans in particular have expanded their participation in new and alternative ways of giving—from online fundraising to micro-volunteering and civic participation—which enable giving while requiring smaller time and monetary commitments.

We also investigated a number of drivers and barriers to giving. We found that while many people say that volunteering and making donations might benefit them in various ways, perceiving giving as an altruistic act was the clearest actual predictor of giving. Similarly, the single most important aspect of the volunteer experience when predicting volunteering frequency was whether volunteers could see that their work made a difference. On the basis of this evidence, and the psychological theory of motivation crowding, we suggest that framing giving as an altruistic act may be the best way to motivate people to give.

We find, too, that people who remember giving as a child are more likely to give today—including seniors who recall childhood giving from when they were growing up. While the evidence we have is not yet enough to show conclusively whether childhood giving indeed establishes a lifelong habit, we suggest further exploration of how childhood giving programmes might be designed to serve this purpose.








Those with an interest in social issues are also more likely to give more often. We suggest that media tie-ins with giving opportunities can capitalise on this effect to link awareness with action.

Religion, too, plays an important role in giving in our vibrant multireligious society. We show that for religious believers, an active participation in religious life is a strong predictor of frequent giving behaviour. This presents an opportunity to explore what such communities can teach us about secular giving—including the possibility that tightly-knit communities, such as school alumni groups or sports clubs, might hold the potential to strengthen our giving culture.

Finally, we show that a lack of trust is a key barrier to giving, especially donation. Our focus group participants repeatedly raised concerns about donation scams, and our survey evidence shows that trust in charities, as well as trust in others outside one's social circle, is a clear predictor of whether people give. We suggest that working to increase public confidence in the non-profit sector is an important avenue to overcome this issue.

Overall, our 2023 study shows a mixed picture. While volunteering has rebounded since the beginning of the pandemic, and the number of people donating has remained stable, people have cut back on the hours they volunteer and the amount they donate. People in Singapore continue to experiment with new and innovative forms of giving. Most crucially, they are most motivated to give if they perceive giving as an altruistic act—showing a genuine desire to help others. If this public-spirited motivation can be harnessed, we can achieve a truly flourishing culture of giving in Singapore over time.

The Big Picture of Giving in Singapore (2023)							
	How many?		How much?		How often?		How else?
	Volunteering	Donating	Volunteering	Donating	Volunteering	Donating	Other ways
Key findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Significantly increased</li> <li>More people volunteering in 2023 than 2021</li> <li>Returned to pre-COVID levels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remained stable</li> <li>Around same number of people donating in 2023 as 2021</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9.43 hours</li> <li>Significantly less than 2021 (12 hours)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>\$100</li> <li>Significantly less than 2021 (\$200)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monthly volunteering significantly declined, from 24% to 17%</li> <li>61% of volunteers only occasionally volunteered (once every quarter or less often)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monthly donations significantly declined, from 40% to 34%</li> <li>55% of donors still only occasionally donate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many donated in-kind, engaged in spontaneous acts of kindness, bought goods from NPOs</li> <li>Almost half raised awareness about a cause</li> </ul>
Gender differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No significant differences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Women more likely to have donated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No significant differences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No significant differences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Men significantly more likely to volunteer only occasionally</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No significant differences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Men were more likely to attend social cause events, solve community issues with others, and create social issue original online content</li> <li>Women were more likely to contribute to environmental conservation efforts</li> </ul>
Age differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth were more likely to volunteer than other age groups in 2023</li> <li>Significantly higher number of youth, adult and pre-senior volunteers in 2023 vs 2021</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seniors were more likely to donate than other age groups in 2023</li> <li>Significantly higher number of pre-senior and senior donors in 2023 vs 2021</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pre-seniors and seniors volunteered significantly longer hours</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No significant differences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Weekly volunteering significantly higher among senior volunteers</li> <li>Occasional volunteering significantly higher among youth, adult and pre-senior volunteers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No significant differences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth were more likely to sign petitions, and comment on social issue posts online</li> <li>Youth and adults were more likely to have followed public figures and attend virtual social cause discussions</li> </ul>

DRIVERS OF GIVING	BARRIERS TO GIVING
 <p><b>Perceptions of Volunteering and Donation</b></p> <p>Seeing volunteering as beneficial for other-centred, altruistic reasons—like seeing volunteerism and donation as a way of helping, or gaining better understanding of others—is the clearest driver of giving.</p>	 <p><b>The Importance of Trust</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fear of scams was cited as a major reason for not donating by 32% of those who did not donate in 2023—a 9%-point increase since 2021.</li> <li>Having a negative or distrustful perception of charities in general was a clear negative predictor of frequency of making donations.</li> <li>Trust in members of social outgroups (such as other religions, other nationalities, or those outside one's social circle) was also a clear predictor of both how often people donate and how often they volunteered.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Early Introduction to Giving</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individuals who volunteered or donated before the age of 13 were more likely to have done so in the past 12 months.</li> <li>Childhood giving is not merely an effect of other values transmitted within families; instead, exposure to giving even from outside the family is associated with long-term behavioural changes.</li> </ul>	 <p><b>Resources: Financial Constraints</b></p> <p>Perceived and actual financial constraints were an important barrier to how frequently people engaged in the act of donation, regardless of the monetary quantities involved.</p>
 <p><b>Strength of Religious / Spiritual Affiliation</b></p> <p>Those who subjectively perceived religion to be more important in their lives, and those who attend religious services regularly, were more likely to give more often.</p>	 <p><b>Resources: Time Constraints</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Time-related constraints (such as needing more time for family commitments, work, and school, or other priorities; volunteering schedules being too inflexible) were the most cited reason for not volunteering in 2023.</li> <li>These time-related constraints were a strong predictor of how many hours, as well as how often people volunteer.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Interest in Social Issues</b></p> <p>Individuals who expressed a keen interest in staying informed about current affairs either by reading or watching the news, or contemplating or engaging in discussions on social issues, tended to have been more active volunteers and donors as well.</p>	

The background is a solid dark blue. It features two large, overlapping circles. The circle on the left is a lighter shade of blue, while the one on the right is a darker shade. A thin, light blue vertical line starts from the top right edge, curves around the right side of the lighter circle, and then extends downwards, ending with a small dot at the level of the 'STUDY OVERVIEW' text.

# **STUDY OVERVIEW**

**Methods**  
**Definitions**

# Study Overview

The National Giving Study (NGS) 2023 report is based on a quantitative survey conducted with a sample of 1,951 respondents across Singapore, supplemented by 33 qualitative focus group discussions with 112 participants across different age groups and giver profiles. The primary objective of NGS is to assess the current state of the giving culture in Singapore by examining the rates of charitable giving at a national level and identifying the factors that impact and inhibit volunteerism and donations.



## QUANTITATIVE SURVEY

The final sample comprises **1,951** respondents **aged 15 and over**. The sample includes **Singapore Citizens, Permanent Residents, individuals on Employment, Dependent, Student passes, as well as those who hold a Work Permit or an S Pass Permit**. Participants were obtained through stratified random sampling by geographic region from the Department of Statistics' National Database on Dwellings in Singapore. Weights were also applied to the final sample to ensure a nationally representative breakdown of age, gender, and ethnicity is reported.

The survey was mainly **self-administered** using Computer Aided Personal Interviewing (CAPI). Respondents self-completed the digital survey (i.e., programmed on a tablet), **under the supervision of trained fieldwork personnel**. Showcards were used when required, for example, when there was a long list of options for certain questions. Data collection took place between 19 September 2023 and 12 January 2024.

We used a combination of statistical methods to test for relationships in the survey data. To analyse relationships between individual questionnaire items, we used multiple linear regressions and ANOVA. To analyse more complex scales, such as when measuring perceptions of volunteering and donation, we used confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling. Technical details of model fit, and coefficients are not included in this report; however, all findings reported as significant are significant at  $p < 0.05$ , and all multivariate models met conventional fit thresholds for CFI, TLI, RMSEA and chi-squared tests.





## QUALITATIVE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

A total of **33 focus group discussions** (FGDs) were conducted with **112 participants**, comprising previous survey respondents from NVPC's Individual Giving Study, users of NVPC's giving.sg platform, and convenience sampling. Two to six participants took part in each FGD, segmented based on participants' **age groups** (i.e., aged 15 to 25; 26 to 35; 36 to 49; and 50+) and **giver profile** (i.e., volunteers; donors; potential givers; and non-givers), detailed in the table below:

Age group / Giver profile	Volunteers	Donors	Potential givers	Non-givers	Total per age group
No. of FGDs (No. of participants per FGD)					
<b>Aged 15 to 25</b>	2 (7)	1 (2)	1 (3)	2 (6)	6 (18)
<b>Aged 26 to 35</b>	2 (6)	2 (7)	2 (5)	2 (10)	8 (28)
<b>Aged 36 to 49</b>	3 (9)	3 (9)	2 (10)	2 (6)	10 (34)
<b>Aged 50+</b>	2 (9)	2 (7)	2 (8)	3 (8)	9 (32)
<b>Total per giver profile</b>	9 (31)	8 (25)	7 (26)	9 (30)	33 (112)
Number of FGDs and participants per segment.					

We conducted the FGDs in English over the online video-conferencing platform Zoom, with the exception of two discussions that were held in-person to accommodate participants' needs. Each FGD lasted approximately 1.5 hours, **led by a trained moderator** and assisted by a co-moderator. A **content analysis** of the discussion transcripts was subsequently completed. The FGDs took place between 25 November 2022 and 31 March 2023.



# DEFINITIONS

## GIVING

Our primary aim is to build a culture of giving in Singapore. By 'giving', we mean voluntary actions people take to help others outside of their social circle, simply for the sake of helping them. While helping friends and family is important, too, here we are focused on more broadly public-spirited actions, in which givers expect neither financial rewards, nor the kind of reciprocal help that often comes with helping others in our social circle.

Giving can take many forms. People can help others by volunteering their time and skills; by donating money or necessary items in-kind; by spreading the word about important causes; or by mobilising networks of friends and acquaintances to help others. We try to capture all these forms of giving, to paint a holistic picture of the giving culture in Singapore.

Within this picture, two key concepts are volunteering and donating.

## VOLUNTEERING

There are many ways to define volunteering, ranging from purely economic definitions including any form of uncompensated labour to definitions counting only work performed for non-profit organisations. Because our aim is to assess Singapore's giving culture, we focus on volunteering as an act carried out to help others outside one's immediate social circle—in other words, a fundamentally public-spirited act.

Specifically, in this report, volunteering is defined as an activity one does out of one's own free will, without expecting financial payment, to help others outside of one's household, family, relative or friends. Volunteering excludes compulsory community work such as Values-In-Action (VIA), Community Involvement Program (CIP) in schools and Corrective Work Order (CWO), unless compulsory volunteer hours were exceeded. 'Formal volunteering' refers to volunteering with registered organisations, whereas 'informal volunteering' refers to helping others directly, without going through any registered organisations.

## DONATING

Donations are defined as money given out of one's own free will, without expecting financial payment, to help others outside of one's household, family, relatives, or friends. Donating excludes compulsory payments of money such as paying fines or taxes. 'Formal donating' refers to donations made through registered organisations whereas 'informal donating' refers to donating directly to beneficiaries, without going through any registered organisations.

## AGE GROUPS

- **Youth:** Individuals aged 15 to 35 years
- **Adults:** Individuals aged 36 to 49 years
- **Pre-Seniors:** Individuals aged 50 to 64 years
- **Seniors:** Individuals aged 65 years and over

The background features a dark blue color with abstract geometric elements. A large, thin, light blue circle is on the left. A smaller, thin, yellow circle is on the right, overlapping the blue one. A vertical yellow line segment is positioned between the main title and the sub-topics, starting from the level of the title and ending at the level of the sub-topics.

# **OVERVIEW OF GIVING IN 2023**

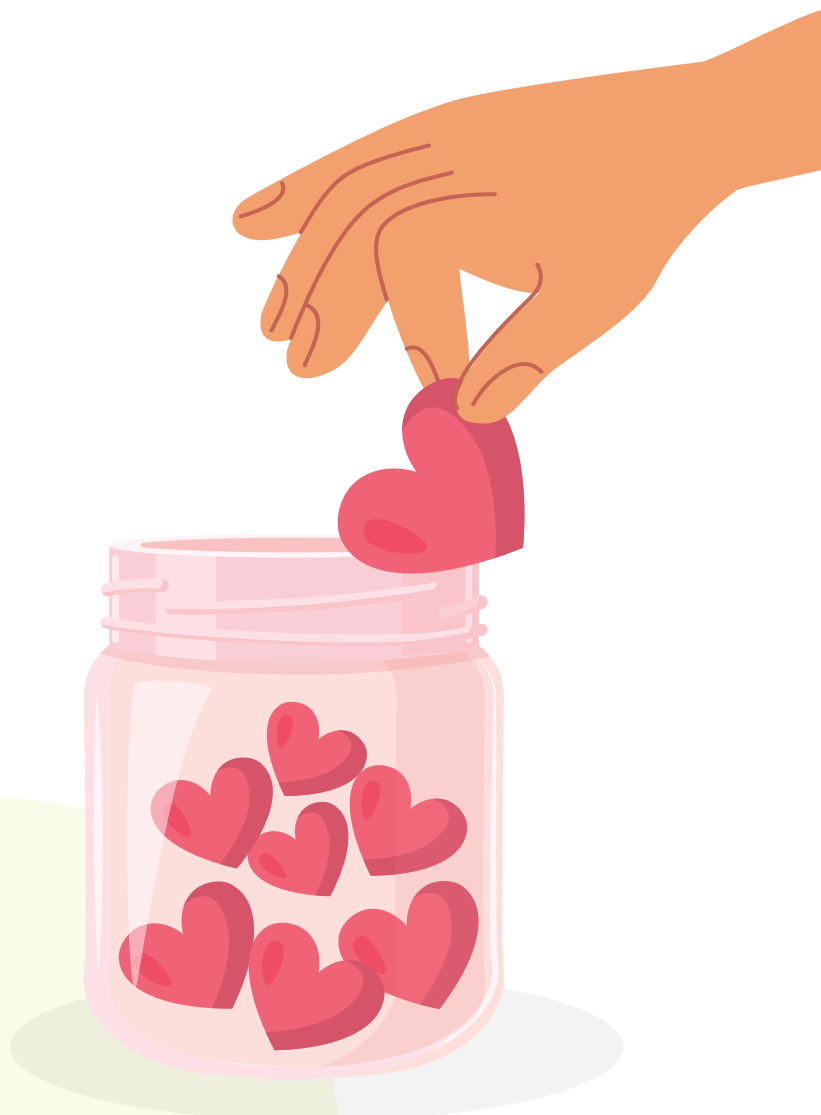
**The State of Individual  
Volunteerism and Donation**

**The Big Picture**

**The How of Giving**

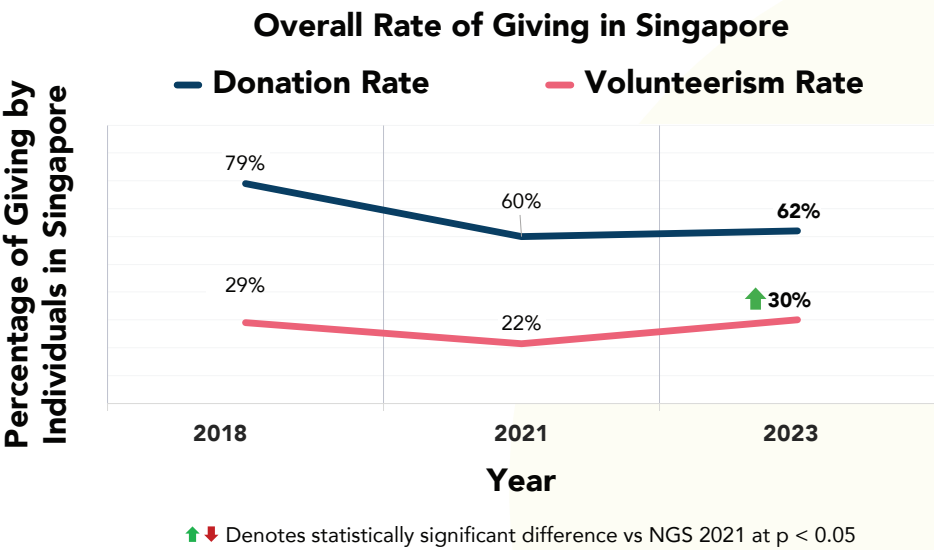
## The State of Individual Volunteerism & Donation

To understand individual giving behaviour, we asked people across Singapore about the activities they had engaged in over the past 12 months. This included volunteering and donating money, but also a range of other ways of helping others. We measured not only whether and how often people gave, but also how much time or money they contributed. This section gives an overview of these indicators, putting them in the context of trends we have observed over time.

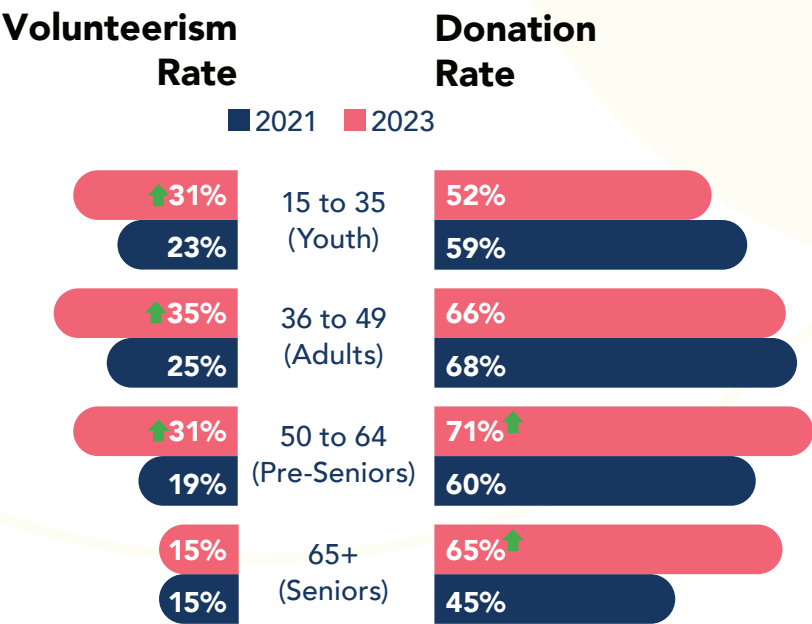


# THE STATE OF INDIVIDUAL VOLUNTEERISM & DONATION

## PREVALENCE OF GIVING



Overall, the number of volunteers saw a statistically significant increase in 2023 (30%)—an encouraging return to pre-COVID levels (22%). Donation rates were stable from 2021 (60%) to 2023 (62%), showing no statistically significant difference.



↑↓ Denotes statistically significant difference vs NGS 2021 at  $p < 0.05$

# THE STATE OF INDIVIDUAL VOLUNTEERISM & DONATION

## VOLUNTEERISM

While volunteerism dipped in 2021, during the height of pandemic restrictions, by 2023, the proportion of the population volunteering had returned to 2018 levels.

The increase in volunteering was observed in all age groups except seniors. Indeed, seniors were less likely to volunteer than all other age groups, both in 2021 and in 2023.

By contrast, significantly more youth volunteered in 2023 than in 2021. Even youth who did not volunteer were more likely than other age groups to have said that they volunteered or donated in previous years. Thus, while youth appear to be particularly interested in giving, they also appear to stop giving more than other groups. This could be a result of financial and time pressures faced by young people upon entering the workforce and starting families.

Turning to gender, there was no statistically significant difference in the likelihood of volunteering between men and women.

## DONATION

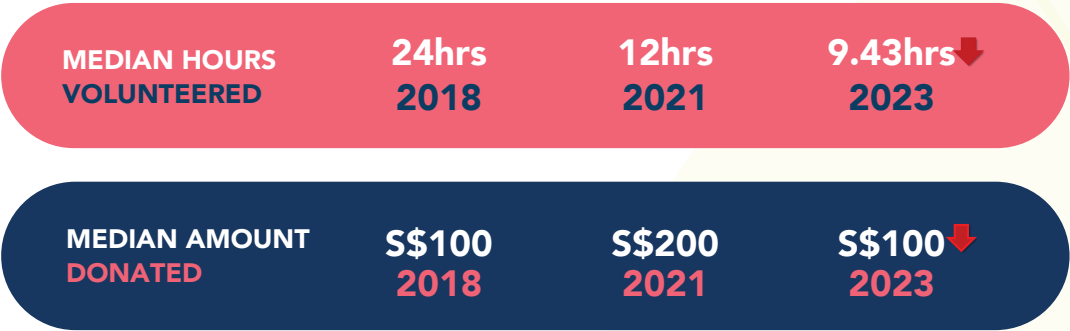
By contrast to volunteering, youth were less likely to donate in 2023 compared to other age groups. The proportion of seniors and pre-seniors making donations also increased compared to 2021, while the proportion donating in younger age groups did not change by a statistically significant amount.

Women were also significantly more likely to have donated in 2023 than men.



# THE STATE OF INDIVIDUAL VOLUNTEERISM & DONATION

## AMOUNT GIVEN



↑↓ Denotes statistically significant difference vs NGS 2021 at  $p < 0.05$

### VOLUNTEERISM

Median hours volunteered decreased from 12 hours in 2021 to 9.43 hours in 2023. Pre-seniors and seniors volunteered much longer hours (median 15.6 hours) compared to younger volunteers.

### DONATION

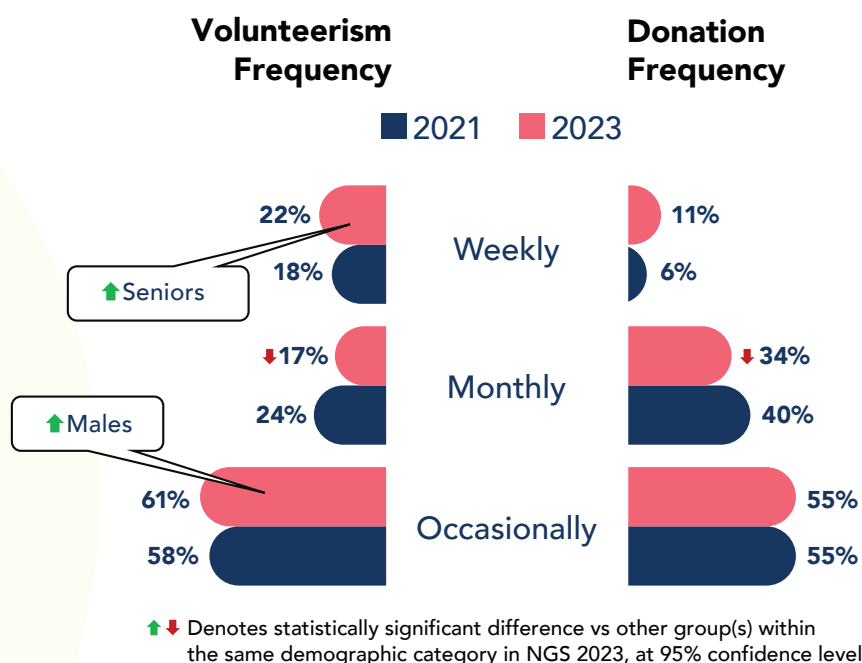
Monetary contributions saw a statistically significant decline, with a median amount donated of \$200 in 2021, down to \$100 per individual in 2023. Median donation amounts showed no statistically significant differences across gender and age groups.





# THE STATE OF INDIVIDUAL VOLUNTEERISM & DONATION

## REGULARITY OF GIVING



## VOLUNTEERISM

Volunteering frequencies in 2023 have been largely comparable to 2021, apart from a significant fall in monthly volunteering. While there has been a growing number of individual volunteers in the past year, the bulk of volunteering (61%) was still taking place occasionally (i.e., every three months or less frequently).

There were significant differences in volunteering schedules across age groups: senior volunteers were more likely to have volunteered on a weekly basis, while youth, adult, and pre-senior volunteers tended towards occasional volunteering. Moreover, as seen earlier, seniors reported volunteering significantly longer hours (median 15.6 hours) in the last 12 months. Senior volunteers, who were also more likely to have been retirees, would understandably have more time on their hands, allowing them to participate in volunteering more regularly than younger volunteers.

Additionally, male volunteers were more likely to have volunteered only occasionally in the last year.

## DONATION

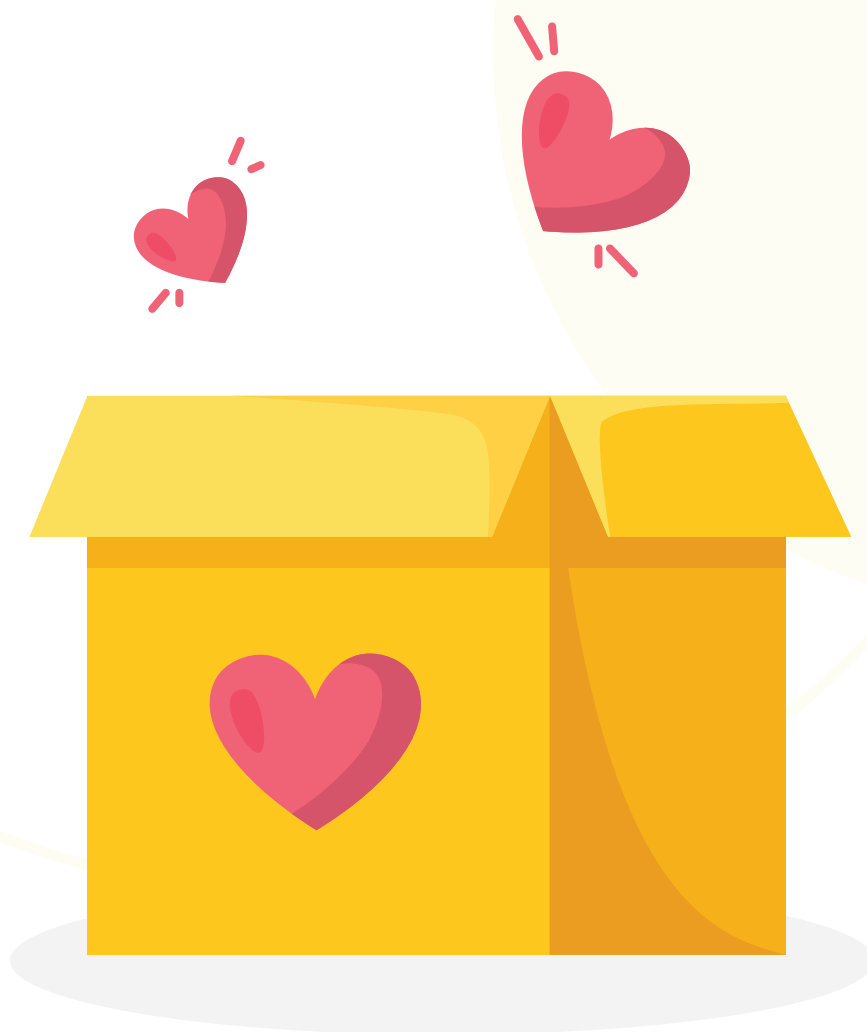
Likewise, the majority of donors in 2023 donated on a quarterly basis or less frequently (i.e., occasionally; 55%), as in 2021. 2023, on the other hand, saw a 6% decrease in monthly donations, along with a 5% increase in weekly giving. Thus there appears to have been a small shift to more frequent donation in 2023.

No statistically significant differences in donation frequency were observed between genders or across age groups.

# THE STATE OF INDIVIDUAL VOLUNTEERISM & DONATION

## ALTERNATIVE GIVING

Beyond traditional conceptions of volunteering time and donating money, people may give in many other ways. We asked respondents about whether they had engaged in a broad range of actions. These included new digital forms of giving, such as social media fundraising as well as more time-tested methods such as donations in kind, civic participation and working to raise awareness about a cause.



# THE STATE OF INDIVIDUAL VOLUNTEERISM & DONATION

## ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF GIVING

Have you done any of the following in the past 12 months?	(All respondents n=1,951)	Statistically Significant Differences
Donation-in-kind	79%	↑ Females ↓ Seniors
Spontaneous acts in everyday situations	77%	↑ Females ↑ Youth & Adults
Bought goods and services from non-profit organisations, charities and/or social enterprises	60%	↓ Pre-Seniors & Seniors
Giving while making a purchase	59%	↓ Pre-Seniors & Seniors
Deliberately avoided or bought products for ethical, environmental, or social causes	56%	↑ Youth & Adults
Gathered with a group of people to give directly to those in need	48%	↓ Pre-Seniors & Seniors
Micro-volunteering	43%	↑ Males ↓ Pre-Seniors & Seniors
Gathered with a group of people to collectively donate a pooled amount of money	42%	↑ Males ↓ Pre-Seniors & Seniors
Gave to a fundraising campaign through social media	38%	↓ Females ↑ Youth & Adults
Medical donations	37%	↑ Males ↓ Pre-Seniors & Seniors
Legacy giving	30%	↓ Pre-Seniors & Seniors
Led a fundraising campaign through social media	28%	↑ Males ↓ Seniors

The pandemic compelled people to find creative ways to help others. With the social distancing measures in place during the COVID-19 outbreak, physical volunteering or in-person monetary donations became virtually impossible.

The NGS 2023 sought to continue measuring innovative adaptations of traditional volunteering and donation. In 2021, around 80% of individuals donated in-kind, and this was statistically unchanged in 2023 (79%). We also measured new digital ways of giving, following the emergence of versatile online platforms like TikTok, Twitch and Instagram, popular among youth and adults: nearly 30% led fundraising campaigns through social media and almost 40% gave to such campaigns.

Men were more likely than women to engage in virtual giving, reporting significantly higher engagement in activities such as giving to, and leading social media fundraisers. Men were also more likely than women to pool funds with a group of people and to give medical donations. Women, on the other hand, were significantly more inclined to donate in-kind—that is, to donate physical assets like old textbooks or clothes—as well as to engage in spontaneous acts of kindness.

More social ways of giving, such as gathering others to volunteer or donate as a group and social media giving were notably less popular among pre-seniors and seniors. These groups were also less inclined to buy goods or services to support NPOs, charities or social enterprises, give while making a purchase, participate in legacy giving, or donate a pooled amount of money with a group of people.

# THE STATE OF INDIVIDUAL VOLUNTEERISM & DONATION

## TIES AND TESTIMONY

Have you done any of the following  
in the past 12 months?

Statistically Significant  
Differences

Raising awareness about a cause	47%	↓ Seniors
Reposted and/or liked content online related to a social cause	11%	↓ Seniors
Participated in environmental conservation efforts	8%	↑ Females ↑ Youth & Adults vs Seniors
Attended an event in support of a social cause	7%	↑ Males ↑ Adults vs Pre-Seniors & Seniors
Actively discussed social causes (offline)	6%	↑ Youth & Adults
Joined an online group dealing with social causes	5%	↓ Seniors
Worked with fellow citizens to solve a problem in your community	5%	↑ Males
Signed a petition	5%	↑ Youth
Followed elected officials, candidates for office, or other public figures on social media	5%	↑ Youth & Adults
Commented on an online news story or blog post to express an opinion about a social cause	4%	↑ Youth
Attended a discussion on social causes	4%	
Created and posted original content online related to a social cause	2%	↑ Males
Contacted a government official about a social cause that is important to you	2%	
Sent a "letter to the editor" to a newspaper or magazine	0%	
None of the above	60%	↑ Females ↑ Pre-Seniors & Seniors

We also sought to understand the prevalence of helping others not only by giving resources, but also by mobilising social contacts, or 'ties', to help others; and by spreading the word about important causes, or engaging in 'testimony'. In their broadest sense, these kinds of giving can include many forms of civic participation. When citizens combine their ties and testimony and work together to address important issues in society, this can be seen as a key form of giving.

Nearly half of individuals said they raised awareness about a cause in the past year. 1 in 10 said they reposted or liked social cause content online. Less than a tenth took part in environmental efforts, attended events in support of social causes, or actively discussed issues in-person.

# THE STATE OF INDIVIDUAL VOLUNTEERISM & DONATION

Youth were significantly more likely to have contributed to a cause by petitioning and voicing their opinions concerning social issues online. Youth and adults were also more inclined to have attended physical discussions on social causes, and showed a particular interest in keeping up to date with public figures by following them on social media. Seniors were less likely to have participated in virtual giving of ties or testimony, such as joining online groups dealing with social causes or using online platforms to repost or like social media content on social causes, or raise awareness about a cause.

While men were more likely than women to have attended events in support of social causes, worked with others to solve community issues, and created original online content related to social issues, women were more inclined to contribute to environmental conservation efforts, such as recycling.

# Overview of Giving in 2023

## The Big Picture

In summary, giving trends in Singapore show a mixed picture. The number of individuals volunteering has now returned to the pre-pandemic level; however, the number of people donating has not changed since 2021. Moreover, the amount given by each giver has dropped in this period—both median number of hours volunteered, and median value of monetary contributions made. While the growing number of volunteers and the stable number of donors are heartening, we see that over half of volunteers and donors were only occasional givers, giving at most every quarter in both 2021 and 2023. On the other hand, there is an interest in less traditional forms of giving, such as using social media for fundraising and spreading awareness, and engaging in conscious consumerism.

### **WHAT DO THESE INDICATORS TELL US ABOUT THE STATE OF INDIVIDUAL GIVING IN SINGAPORE IN THE YEAR 2023?**

*In the context of prevailing economic pressures, the trends above tell of the resilience of giving in the face of challenges: individuals continuing to help others within their means—even if through a smaller amount or a shorter duration. Meanwhile, Singaporeans continue to innovate, and to explore new and creative ways to help others.*

What lies behind these broad patterns? The remainder of the report explores in more depth how giving takes place in Singapore, as well as the factors that impel individuals to contribute, and the hurdles that prevent some from participating in volunteerism and donation.

## The How of Giving

We asked respondents not only about how often and how much they give, but a range of questions about what causes and kinds of organisations they gave to, as well as the specifics of how this giving took place. In this section, we explore breakdowns of each of these questions.



# THE HOW OF GIVING

## DISTRIBUTION OF GIVING

### SECTORS

### VOLUNTEERISM

n=430	Among 2021 Current Volunteers	Sectors Volunteered With	Among 2023 Current Volunteers	n=587	Statistically Significant Differences
32%	Social Service		Social service and welfare	35%	
23%	Religious		Community development	31%	
20%	Community/Grassroots		Religious	26%	↓ Youth
10%	Education		Education	18%	↑ Youth and Adults vs Pre-Seniors
8%	Health		Healthcare	13%	↑ Males
5%	Environment		Environmental protection & sustainability	8%	↑ Males
4%	Civic/Self-help		Arts, culture, and heritage	6%	
4%	Youth		Animals	5%	
3%	Animals		Sports	3%	
3%	Other Overseas		Overseas humanitarian aid	2%	
2%	Sports		Other overseas causes	2%	
1%	Overseas Disaster Relief		Others, please specify	2%	
1%	Arts/Culture/Heritage		Don't know / Prefer not to say	5%	
0%	Political Groups				
6%	Others, please specify				

↑ ↓ Denotes statistically significant difference vs other group(s) within the same demographic category in NGS 2023, at  $p < 0.05$

Social service, community development and religious sectors remained the most popular causes for volunteers in 2023. On the other hand, causes such as environment, animals, sports, arts, culture, and heritage, which were identified as "less supported" in 2021, continued to receive less attention in 2023.

Adults, pre-seniors and seniors were statistically significantly more likely to have volunteered for the religious sector compared to youth. Youth and adults were also more likely to have volunteered for the education sector. Significantly more men than women reported volunteering for healthcare, as well as environmental protection and sustainability causes, in the past 12 months.



# Overview of Giving in 2023

## THE HOW OF GIVING

### DONATION

n=1,221	Among 2021 Current Donors	Sectors Donated to	Among 2023 Current Donors	n=1,209	Statistically Significant Differences
35%	Religious		Religious	37%	↑ Pre-seniors & Seniors
22%	Health		Social service and welfare	26%	↑ Males
21%	Social service		Healthcare	24%	
6%	Animals		Community development	18%	↑ Males
6%	Education		Education	12%	↑ Males ↑ Adults
6%	Overseas Disaster Relief		Animals	11%	↑ Males ↑ Youth & Adults
5%	Community/Grassroots		Overseas humanitarian aid	9%	
5%	Civic/Self-help		Environmental protection and sustainability	4%	
5%	Other overseas		Other overseas causes	3%	
2%	Youth		Arts, culture, and heritage	3%	
2%	Environment		Sports	1%	↑ Males
1%	Arts/Culture/Heritage		Others, please specify	1%	
0%	Sports		Don't know / Prefer not to say	7%	
0%	Political groups				
9%	Others, please specify				

↑ ↓ Denotes statistically significant difference vs other group(s) within the same demographic category in NGS 2023, at  $p < 0.05$

The most commonly chosen organisations for donations in this period were religious, social service, and healthcare organisations. This preference is consistent with the sectors that received most support in 2021.

Donations to the religious sector were notably more common among pre-seniors and seniors compared to younger donors. Support for animal welfare causes was more prevalent among men, as well as youth and adults, while men and adults were significantly more inclined to donate to the education sector. Men, in addition, tended to have made more charitable contributions towards community development, social service, and sports causes.

# THE HOW OF GIVING

## RECIPIENTS VOLUNTEERISM

n=430	Among 2021 Current Volunteers	Recipients of Volunteer Efforts	Among 2023 Current Volunteers	n=587	Statistically Significant Differences
29%	Elderly	Elderly (aged 65 and above)	47%		
25%	Low-income	Children (aged 14 & below)	25%	↑ Females	
18%	Strangers/ General Public	Youth (aged 15 to 35)	22%	↑ Males	
16%	Children (aged 14 & below)	Adults (aged 36 to 64)	17%		
15%	Local community	Low-income groups	16%		
13%	Religious community	Religious / Belief groups	14%	↑ Females	
12%	Youth (aged 15 to 35)	Local community	14%	↑ Males	Pre-Seniors & Seniors vs Youth
8%	Persons with disabilities	Families	10%	↑ Pre-Seniors & Seniors vs Youth	
8%	Family	Persons with disabilities	8%		
5%	People living with terminal illness	General population	8%		
4%	Neighbours	Environment	6%		
3%	Animals	Animals	5%	↑ Females	
3%	Women	Persons living with chronic illnesses / conditions	5%		
3%	Persons with mental health conditions	Foreign / Migrant workers	4%		
3%	Ethnic community	Ethnic groups	2%	↑ Males	
2%	Overseas disaster victims	Persons with mental health conditions	2%		
1%	Incarcerated/Ex-offenders	Persons living with dementia	2%		
0%	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons	Gender groups (e.g., women's causes)	1%	↑ Females	
6%	Others, please specify	Disaster / Crisis victims	1%		
6%	Don't know/Prefer not to say	LGBTQ+ groups	1%		
		Caregivers	0%		
		Incarcerated / ex-offenders and / or families	0%		
		Others, please specify	0%		
		Don't know / Prefer not to say	1%		

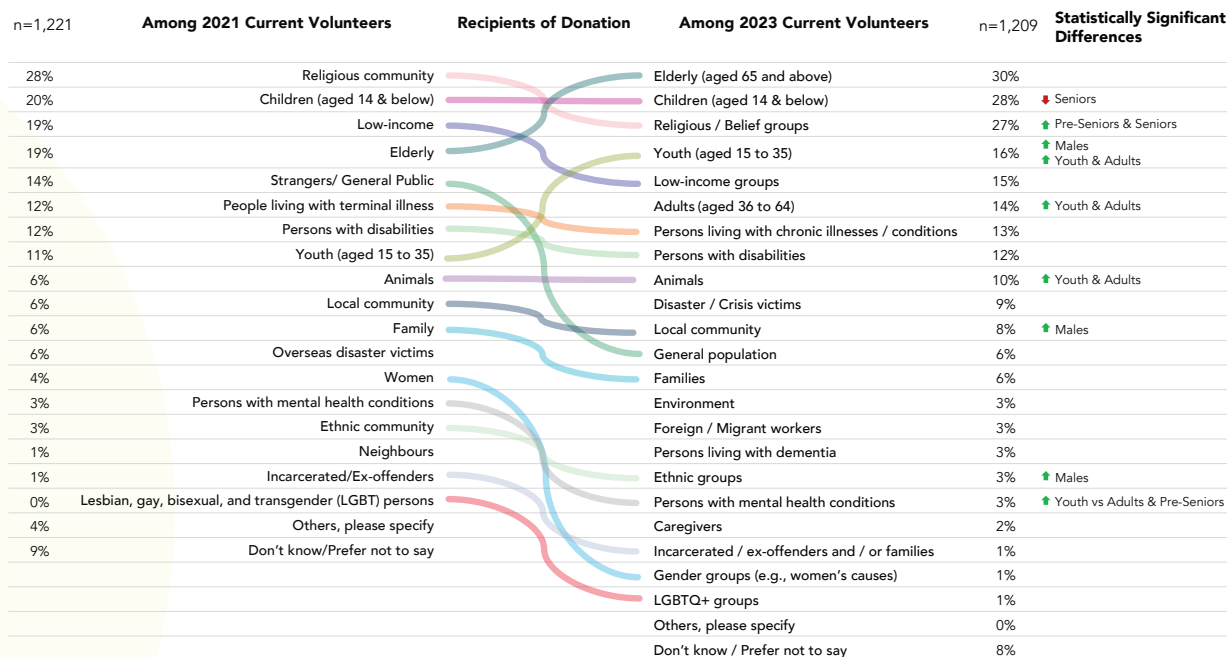
↑↓ Denotes statistically significant difference vs other group(s) within the same demographic category in NGS 2023, at  $p < 0.05$

The elderly remained in the top three recipients of volunteering efforts in 2023, with nearly half of volunteers offering their time and talents for this group. Compared to 2021, children took the place of low-income groups, receiving a quarter of volunteering efforts, while 'general population' fell seven places and was replaced by youth groups in 2023.

Women were significantly more likely to have reported volunteering to benefit children, religious/belief groups, animals, and gender groups. Men, on the other hand, tended toward helping youth, the local community, and ethnic groups. Pre-Seniors and Seniors were more likely to have volunteered to help the local community as well as religious/belief groups than youth.

# THE HOW OF GIVING

## DONATION



↑ ↓ Denotes statistically significant difference vs other group(s) within the same demographic category in NGS 2023, at  $p < 0.05$

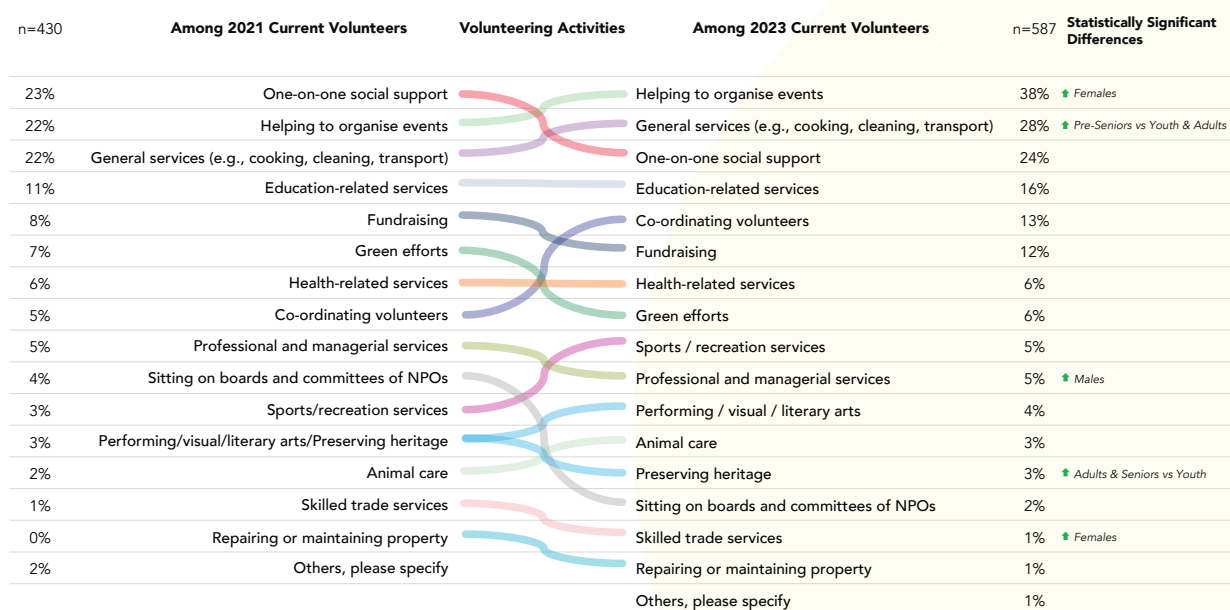
Religious/belief groups remained one of the most popular recipients of monetary contributions in the past 12 months, along with children. The elderly received more donations, climbing three places since 2021.

Youth and adult donors were more inclined to have made charitable donations helping youth, adults, as well as animals. Pre-seniors and seniors were more likely to donate to religious organizations. Notably, youth showed more tendency to supporting mental health groups than adult and pre-senior donors.

Men were more likely than women to report donating toward youth, the local community, and ethnic groups—this mirrors their choices when it came to recipients of their volunteering contributions.

# THE HOW OF GIVING

## METHODS OF GIVING VOLUNTEERISM



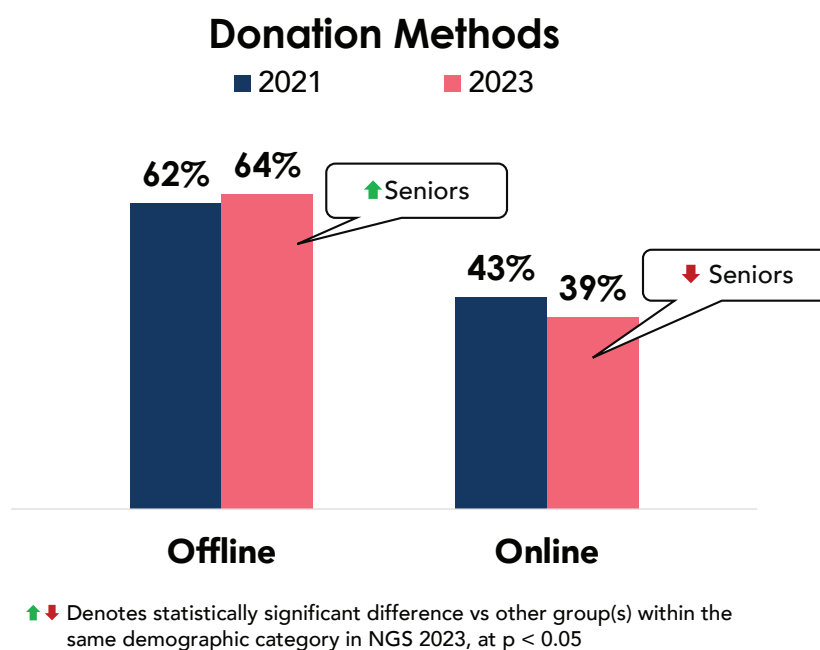
↑ ↓ Denotes statistically significant difference vs other group(s) within the same demographic category in NGS 2023, at  $p < 0.05$

The top three volunteering activities were largely the same in 2023 as in 2021, with at least a quarter of volunteers choosing to offer their time and talent by helping to organise events; volunteering to befriend, mentor, or run errands for people; or performing general administrative or support tasks.

Pre-seniors were more likely to have volunteered by offering general services, such as cooking, cleaning or providing transport. Adults, on the other hand were more likely to have engaged in heritage preservation compared to youth and seniors. Women were more likely than men to volunteer by helping to organise events, as well as by practising a skilled trade, while men were significantly more inclined to offer their professional and managerial services.

# THE HOW OF GIVING

## DONATION



Overall, more people donated offline than online, with 64% of donors giving their monetary contributions in person. 39% of individuals donated online, while fewer than 8% donated via messaging apps.

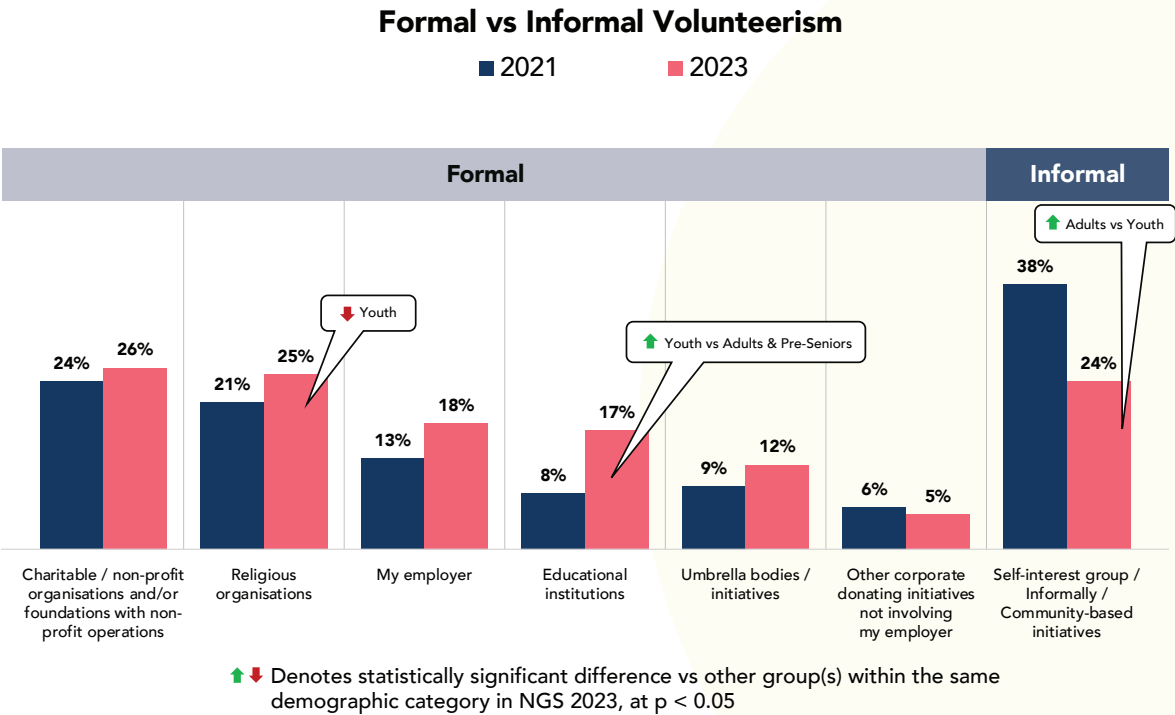
Senior donors were significantly more likely to have donated via offline means (e.g., donated cash at the recipient organisation or by mailing a cheque), while online donation was more likely among youth, adults and pre-seniors.

There were no significant differences observed in donation methods between genders.

# THE HOW OF GIVING

## CHANNELS OF GIVING

### VOLUNTEERISM

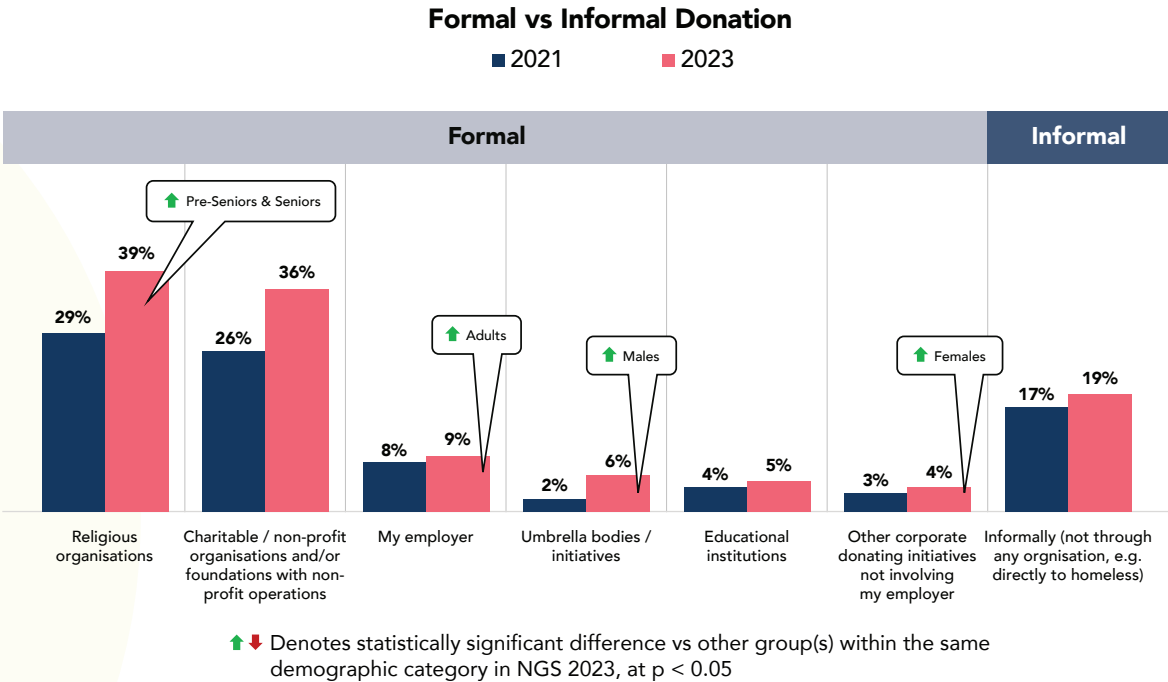


Channels such as non-profit organisations (26%) and religious groups (25%), were common choices for individuals looking to volunteer in 2023. However, nearly a quarter (24%) of volunteers opted to sign up through informal groups or so-called ‘ground-up’ groups. Ground-ups are informal community initiatives which carry out many of the same activities as non-profits, but without formal registration. This trend mirrors the findings of the NVPC Groundup Initiative Study 2023, which noted a rise in the number of ground-up groups in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Adults, pre-seniors, and seniors were more likely to have signed up to volunteer via religious organisations. Youth, on the other hand, were more likely to have signed up via educational institutions compared to adults and pre-seniors. Lastly, adults were more likely to have volunteered via informal organisations than youth. There was no statistically significant difference in sign-up methods observed between men and women.

# THE HOW OF GIVING

## DONATION



By contrast, donors showed a greater inclination for donation through formal organisations, with 39% donating through religious institutions and 36% via NPOs. Nonetheless, 19% of donors contributed through informal groups.

Adults were more likely to have donated through their employers. Pre-seniors and seniors showed a notable preference for signing up with religious organizations.

Male donors were more likely to have donated via umbrella bodies (such as Community Chest and President's Challenge), while female donors tended toward other corporate donating initiatives not involving their employers.

# DRIVERS OF GIVING

Perceptions of Volunteering

Perceptions of Donation

Early Introduction to Giving

Strength of Religious / Spiritual  
Affiliation

Interest in Social Issues



## Drivers of Giving

To understand what motivates people to give, we began with in-depth discussions with FGD participants. We then asked survey respondents a range of questions about their perceptions and experiences of giving, and used statistical modelling to identify factors that predict giving behaviour.



## Perceptions of Volunteering

People may find the volunteer experience motivating for different reasons. For some, volunteering is a way to help others, or to gain a better understanding of people from different backgrounds in society. For others, it may be a good way to enhance their CV, gain new skills, or make new friends.

We asked participants in the FGDs to share their reasons for volunteering, or what might propel them to act. Some of these reasons stemmed from **self-interested** motivations, while others had a more **other-centred** focus.

Self-interested motivations	Selected participants' quotes
To feel good about oneself	<p>...it just makes me feel good about myself... if I don't give something back, then I feel... selfish... I just feel like everyone should always do something to give back. I don't know the exact reason. I just feel satisfied.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>18-year-old student</b></li></ul> <p>When you give something... you don't expect anything in return, but you feel inside, there's amount of happiness. Great, great happiness within yourself either in donating time or money. That's a good source of inspiration.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>75-year-old retiree</b></li></ul> <p>...you have interaction with different people and maybe they're... interested... you feel happy that you're actually doing something.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>20-year-old student</b></li></ul> <p>...what [motivates] me to give either in terms of money or time is to pay it forward... sometimes you feel that if you are being blessed, then I think you should take this opportunity to bless others... it [gives] you a form of personal satisfaction... when you manage to put a smile on somebody's face...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>64-year-old retiree</b></li></ul>

# PERCEPTIONS OF VOLUNTEERING

Self-interested motivations	Selected participants' quotes
<b>To gain new skills/knowledge/experience</b>	<p>It's more like...the rewards on...what I can do with this experience...can I put it in my portfolio?... What can I get after this?... do I learn something new or something?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>18-year-old student</b></li> </ul> <p>...[starting] out it was definitely... just to try out something different. I think maybe at that point I felt maybe I was a bit too young to really kind of understand... why people volunteer and for me it's just to kind of go and seek experiences with friends, different experiences.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>23-year-old student</b></li> </ul>
<b>To make new friends or spend time with friends</b>	<p>I think if it's something that helps... you and your friends bond together, maybe it's worth it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>23-year-old student</b></li> </ul> <p>...they are like small groups of people that go around and volunteer and do stuff... at the same time can make new friends...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>20-year-old student</b></li> </ul>
<b>To meet personal desires/needs, such as enhancing one's portfolio</b>	<p>...another experience that I'm looking at is... overseas volunteering experience... if you volunteer overseas... In exchange you can get... free hostel stays or... free food or something like that.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>18-year-old student</b></li> </ul> <p>I get motivated by... building my portfolio and... getting... volunteering experiences so that... my portfolio looks good a lot.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>18-year-old student</b></li> </ul> <p>Because it helps with like career and stuff so I would be more likely to do it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>21-year-old unemployed</b></li> </ul>

# PERCEPTIONS OF VOLUNTEERING

Self-interested motivations	Selected participants' quotes
<b>Belief in accumulating good karma for oneself</b>	<p>...I think that as a Chinese saying [goes]... when you do good [deeds]... maybe next time [when] you [are in] need, people will help you in another way... the mentality [that] I have [is] not that you are expecting people to repay you, but you're doing good stuff... in return you might... need help in some other ways.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>51-year-old employee</b></li></ul> <p>...if you help others, others will help you. And, and somehow you find that... your life [becomes] a little bit smoother... as you continue to do... charity...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>52-year-old employee</b></li></ul> <p>And I also believe...what goes around comes around.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>18-year-old student</b></li></ul> <p>...it's very natural because we take a lot from God, and we just give back... and God also will multiply...our give...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>62-year-old retiree</b></li></ul>

# PERCEPTIONS OF VOLUNTEERING

Other-centred motivations	Selected participants' quotes
<b>To make others feel good or better their lives</b>	<p>...for example, elderly. I think it makes them feel good that there are people who, you know, care about them. Or if it's like kids, it's nice to see more people... they have fun, they have people to play with.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>18-year-old student</b></li> </ul> <p>I just like the aspect of empowering a lot better because I feel that for me, being in Singapore, I've had a lot of opportunities and I feel that many people in, not just in Singapore, but I think many other countries as well don't have these opportunities. And I think that it's just a little something that you can [do] so that you can... give people these opportunities better.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>23-year-old student</b></li> </ul> <p>...it's always good to give your service to others to improve their livelihood or whatever it is, to make them happier in return. I think you also have happiness.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>75-year-old retiree</b></li> </ul>
<b>To make an impact on others</b>	<p>...really see firstly what I can make an impact on... how I can benefit others and also to see what I enjoy the most.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>18-year-old student</b></li> </ul> <p>...if volunteering has a bit more of... the personal touch... in the sense that you really know... who you're making an impact on, you really kind of know... what organizations or who exactly is kind of benefiting from it. And I feel that's a lot more... meaningful to me personally.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>23-year-old student</b></li> </ul> <p>you want to make a difference in wherever you are helping.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>59-year-old homemaker</b></li> </ul>

# PERCEPTIONS OF VOLUNTEERING

Other-centred motivations	Selected participants' quotes
To make others feel good or better their lives	<p>I want to go into volunteerism. I want to give back to society.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 63-year-old employee</li></ul> <p>It's a belief. Chinese belief is... you take from the society, you give back to society.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 63-year-old retiree</li></ul>

Following these qualitative results, we set out in our quantitative survey to investigate which of these perceptions of volunteering served to motivate volunteers. **In other words, did these different perceptions predict an increased frequency of volunteering?**

The results were surprising. **People who saw volunteering as particularly beneficial for self-interested reasons**—such as saying that volunteering was a good way of helping their career, feeling better about themselves, feeling less lonely or vulnerable, or fitting in with their own social group—**were no more likely to volunteer than people who disagreed with these claims.**

On the other hand, **those who saw volunteering as beneficial for other-centred reasons**—like seeing volunteerism as a way of helping, or of gaining a better understanding of others—**were significantly more likely to volunteer, and to do so more frequently.** This other-centred perception of volunteering is a clear predictor of how often people in Singapore volunteer.

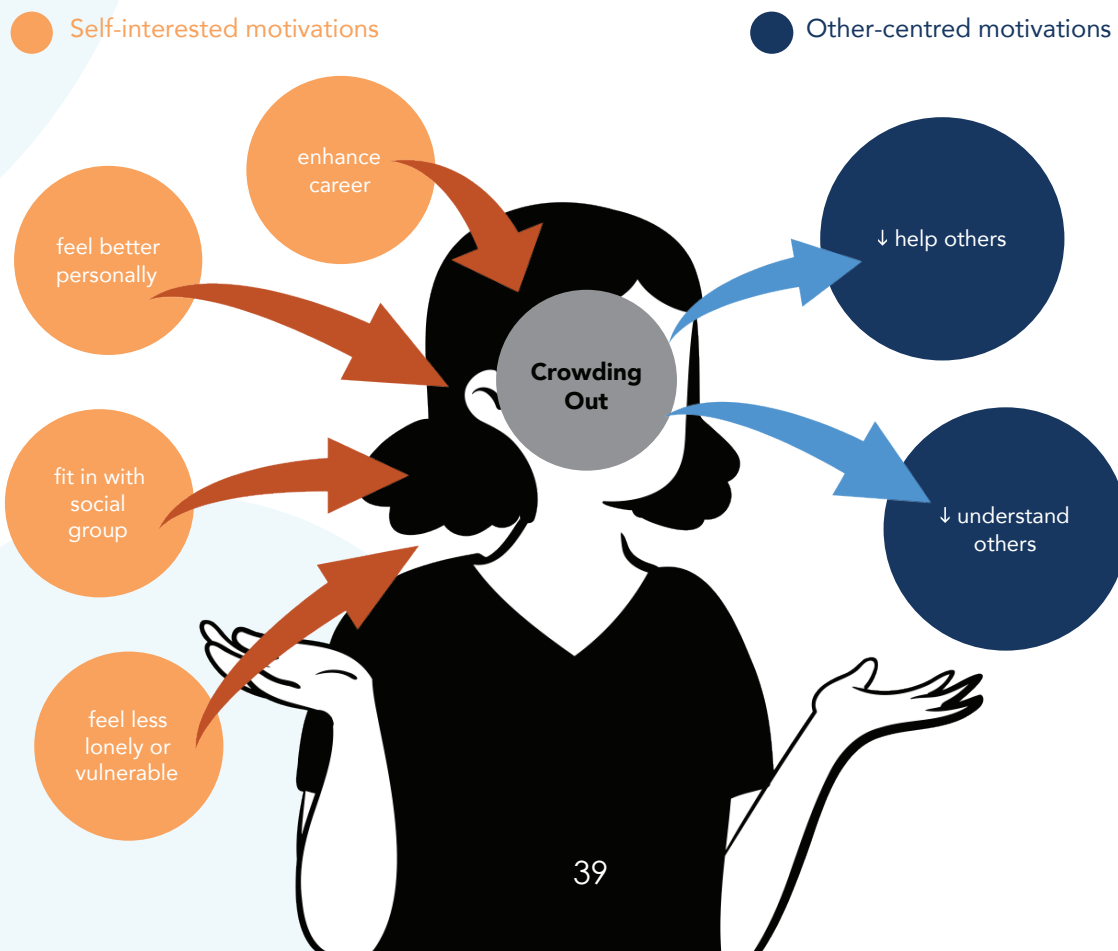
Breaking this down by age gives a further insight. Across age groups, other-centred perceptions of volunteering positively predicted volunteering. By contrast, in younger age groups, self-orientated perceptions of volunteering negatively predicted volunteering. **That is, depending on age, having self-centred perceptions of volunteering either does not increase, or actually decreases, the odds of volunteering.** Thus, it seems that while many people perceive volunteering as having self-interested benefits for the volunteer, this perception does not drive volunteering, and in fact, appears to predict non-volunteering in some age groups.

# PERCEPTIONS OF VOLUNTEERING

We can shed further light on this through measurements of aspects of volunteer satisfaction with current volunteers. We asked current volunteers to describe **how satisfied they were with their volunteering experience** on several different dimensions: how much support they received from the organisation; how empowered they felt; how much they enjoyed their relationships with others in the organisation; and how much they felt they were able to make a difference through their volunteering.

Again, we found that the only clear predictor of how often people volunteered was **how much they felt they were able to make a difference**. The perception among current volunteers that they could help others effectively was a clear predictor of how often they volunteered, overriding the effect of other factors, such as social relationships with other volunteers.

These results are intriguing. Why were those who saw volunteering as a good career enhancer less likely to volunteer? Why were the effects of empowerment and organisational support—seemingly important aspects of the volunteer experience—on the likelihood of volunteering negligible, when taking into account the feeling of making a difference?



# PERCEPTIONS OF VOLUNTEERING

One way of understanding these results is through the **theory of motivation crowding**, taken from psychology and behavioural economics. According to that theory, people in many situations are intrinsically motivated to help others. However, if those people are offered a material incentive to help others, **their intrinsic motivation** disappears, or is **'crowded out'**, by the extrinsic motivation of the reward. This happens because the act of helping is reframed as a transaction, which can only happen in exchange for some benefit to the giver.

Similarly, it may be that those individuals who see volunteering as a self-interested act are less likely to be intrinsically motivated to help others. On the other hand, those who see it as a way of helping others, and those volunteers who believe that their activities are effectively helping others, may thereby have strengthened intrinsic motivations. This possibility has important implications for NPOs, volunteer organisations, and government.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Volunteering should be framed primarily as a way of helping and understanding others.

While it is true that volunteering may bring other benefits, such as advancing careers or developing skills, a self-interested framing risks undermining intrinsic motivation. Our evidence suggests that emphasising the altruistic nature of the act is more likely to motivate people to volunteer.

"...if you're volunteering, [you] **know the kind of impact that you're giving** and you **know the impact exactly**. So, I feel that in that sense, I feel... **more confident** knowing that my efforts have [gone into] a particular cause from volunteering."

• **23-year-old student**

### 2. NPOs should give volunteers regular, concrete experience of the impact of their work on beneficiaries.

Our evidence strongly suggests that the strongest motivational factor in keeping volunteers regularly engaged is the sense that their activities matter. Perhaps the best way to reinforce this is to ensure that the volunteer experience includes regular and concrete contact with the positive impacts of a volunteer's contributions.

"**[Show] that they have made an impact**...I guess maybe once we are [done] volunteering, then maybe they can send receipts [to] show that... you did this, this, this... just to **show that what you did help someone else** or... for some other cause..."

• **20-year-old student**



## Perceptions of Donation

As with volunteering, people may be motivated to donate for a variety of reasons. Some people perceive donation as a way of helping others, while others may see it as a way of securing tax benefits. For still others, donation may be seen as a risky activity because they lack trust in charities or feel constrained by their own finances.

Participants in the FGDs shared how they perceived donations, with particular focus on why they would donate, and what would discourage them from donating.

Self-centred perceptions	Selected participants' quotes
Collecting tax benefits	<p>A lot of my classmates will go on and on about, oh my gosh, we help them today, blah, blah, blah. I just never related... I think I'm [a] very [grounded-in-reality] kind of person... I need to be able to get something out of it, you know? And I understand, tax deductions are a thing, but... I'm a student now, so I don't make any income. So maybe in the future when I'm earning money, I'll consider donating for tax deductions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>22-year-old student</b></li> </ul> <p>...I think tax rebate definitely is one priority there... Apart from that... it'll be more like whether [there's] a need... is it donating to someone [whom] I think requires that donation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>45-year-old employee</b></li> </ul> <p>...once I donated... there was a little disappointment. They told me that it could be tax refund, and when I submitted for tax refund, apparently it was not registered, so I couldn't get my tax refund... That was one of the bad experience.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>52-year-old employee</b></li> </ul>
Fitting in with friends who also donate	<p>If my friends donate, then I would also donate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>21-year-old unemployed</b></li> </ul>

# PERCEPTIONS OF DONATION

Self-centred perceptions	Selected participants' quotes
<b>Feeling good about oneself, improving one's reputation, or meet one's needs</b>	<p>To be very honest, I started donating because I was just worried about my bad karma... But over time, when I saw the reaction to my donation, my volunteering... that motivated me, then I realized it was more than just fulfilling... but more like, just spreading kindness, paying it forward, I think it really enriched my soul. It made me feel really good.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>25-year-old employee</b></li></ul> <p>I think it makes you feel good really, after you... make a donation... you feel happy, internal happiness, even if you help somebody out... help the auntie to bring the plastic bag, just cross the road or help the uncle to push the wheelchair downstairs... when it happens, you get a little bit of... happiness, like satisfaction... like, I've done something... God has blessed me...</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>40-year-old employee</b></li></ul> <p>I... donate regularly to [CHARITABLE ORGANISATION] because I got relatives and friends [who passed] away from this type of illness... I don't know, in the future, maybe I will also get cancer or even heart disease. So, by contributing now, who knows, my contribution could help with the research, and in the future, it may benefit me based on their research... so, in a way it's like I'm donating to a cause that, maybe in the future I'll have a need for it.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>45-year-old employee</b></li></ul> <p>...what [motivates] me to give either in terms of money or time is to pay it forward... sometimes you feel that if you are being blessed, then I think you should take this opportunity to bless others also, and it [gives] you a form of personal satisfaction... when you manage to put a smile on somebody's face.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>63-year-old retiree</b></li></ul>

# PERCEPTIONS OF DONATION

Self-centred perceptions	Selected participants' quotes
Seeing donation as a risky activity due to personal financial constraints	<p>I'm not... particularly driven... to donate... it's just of more... [that] I'm not donating... huge sums of money, so it's... okay...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>24-year-old employee</b></li> </ul> <p>...it's just that I prefer to see face-to-face [to] know that [the donation is] going to be useful... Sometimes when you are financially tied, you can't really do it... [so if] I want to do something, it is better for me to do it face-to-face, see [that] they really need it, and we give [money] when we have it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>29-year-old employee</b></li> </ul>
Seeing donation as a risky activity due to personal financial constraints	<p>...if it's monetary then it's a different case. Because [there have] been cases where... money [is] used in... different ways... not intended for the original purpose... in that case then I have to look for... a reputable organization.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>19-year-old student</b></li> </ul> <p>...what really attracts me to... donate or volunteer for a cause is really when the [organisation] is very sure of what it's doing. Like the purpose of... the whole campaign and... who they're helping and... what their needs are... you know, something that is very well thought up... it really makes me [certain] that... this campaign or this organization is really looking to help.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>24-year-old employee</b></li> </ul> <p>...have to really vet through that [organisation to check] what they [are asking for donations] for, what's the fund going [to] do, how they [will] manage my fund. I have to make sure it goes to the right intention.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>52-year-old unemployed</b></li> </ul> <p>...I still help them in some donations because I really trust them because... they produce a set of these statements of their accounts, audited.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>75-year-old retiree</b></li> </ul>

# PERCEPTIONS OF DONATION

We asked respondents to the quantitative survey to describe their perceptions of donation across six broad categories, borrowing from an existing measure of donor motives—both for and against donation:

1. Helping others
2. Collecting tax benefits
3. Fitting in with friends who also donate
4. Feeling good about oneself or improving one's reputation
5. Seeing donation as a risky activity due to personal financial constraints
6. Not trusting charities

Again, self-centred perceptions of donation (i.e., motives 2 to 6) appear to be of little importance in predicting behaviour. While tax considerations (motive 2) did predict a small proportion of donation frequency, they were by far the weakest predictor. Trust in charities (motive 6), a lack of financial constraints (motive 5), the presence of other donors in one's social network (motive 3), and a feeling that donations give the donor a sense of recognition (motive 4) all contribute to donation frequency. Taken together, these other factors make small, but statistically significant, contributions.

Yet, by far the **strongest predictor** of donation frequency was the **perception that donation is a way of helping others—an other-centred, altruistic motive**.

It is striking that, as with volunteering, an altruistic perception of donation wins out over seeing this behaviour as a way of helping oneself, for example, through tax benefits. Of course, tax benefits may also motivate donors; but the framing of charitable contributions as primarily self-interested appears to motivate them very little, compared to framing them as an altruistic act.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Charitable donations should be framed primarily as a way of helping others. Tax benefits may motivate people, but our evidence suggests that framing donations as a self-interested act may be less effective than emphasising their altruistic character.

## Early Introduction to Giving

Can childhood experiences of giving shape behaviour patterns into adulthood? As with many other habits formed in childhood, it seems likely that they can. Participants from the FGDs shared how giving experiences in their childhood had influenced how they later chose to give. Some of them saw their parents as role models whose giving behaviours they would like to emulate, while for others, acts of giving had become habitual from constant exposure in their social environment since they were young.



# EARLY INTRODUCTION TO GIVING

## Selected participants' quotes

I think school definitely kind of started my volunteering experience. But I think now continuing on, I think I'm just seeking for experiences as they come. I think now... school-based volunteering is not really the motivation for me because I'm right now in university... I'm just continuing it because I had a few friends do it and they told me about how it was.

### • 23-year-old student

I feel that starting [in] school, having all these voluntary experience, it's really helped us in our growth... since young, we've gone through a lot of volunteering activities and we have the mindset of... [to volunteer] and it's very... instinctive... we will instinctively [look up] voluntary activities... Whenever we saw one, we'll be like... this looks interesting, I should join and not [be] forced to that kind. So, I think since young influence is a very important factor also.

### • 23-year-old student

There are times when [I heard] from my teacher... during secondary school time... [when] we do CIP [and] usually [the] teacher [would be] involved... [they would] share certain organization or certain homes [where] people [would] really benefit... some of my friends and I, we say, "Hey, why not go and try out, let's go there."

### • 30-year-old homemaker

..,my parents are by nature givers... not really [through] donating for charitable institutions... for example, we have... a family friend who was going through a very rough patch in life... in a financial problem or struggle... I remember them like cooking and then giving it to that family or buying groceries for that family.

### • 37-year-old employee

...it was our parents who actually started this giving concept. So... we had a very small household and there was a box kept in the... temple... and they said, this is something out of whatever we earn... it's a percentage that's kept in the box, which goes for donation.

### • 40-year-old homemaker

...I have friends who have kids as well. So, what started out as parents forcing their kids to do volunteer work. At first it was forcing them to help. I think about the first two months or so, they were being forced and subsequently, the kids themselves asked their parents, why are we not going to volunteer this week? I think... because... they interact with elderly... they also get the reaction [from the elderly]... because the elderly... are usually very happy to play with kids as well... genuine reactions... So, it's quite a nice thing... beyond the school system...

### • 45-year-old employee

# EARLY INTRODUCTION TO GIVING

## Selected participants' quotes

...[donating] for me, it's from young, from school time and from...parents also... because I [came] from a convent school, [there were] always quite a number of donation drives... where we would, go out with that bucket... and ask for donations... from young, [there was] that awareness about people out there who are need... going to church and all this from young, [you were] shown around about donating money.

### • 47-year-old employee

...I'm sure everyone would remember when you were a young kid your parents would give you 10 cents, 20 cents to put into those little donation boxes. So that was the first trigger for me. I would trot trot trot around, I was just a toddler, I take the 10 cents, 20 cents, put into the... donation box... And as I grow older, schools have a lot of donation drives, since primary and secondary school and at that point it was a little bit of competition, who's going to get top fundraiser, but at the end of the day they also tell us where the money is going to, so that was also useful. And as I was about, if I recall, I was about 12, I started my own donation drive for some children's charity by making fruit baskets baskets... at that time I was very young I was able to sell each fruit basket for about \$5 and when I gave the money to the charity, I could see that they were very happy about it... as I grew older... I decided to donate computers again it's in-kind to [CHARITABLE ORGANISATION].

### • 55-year-old employee

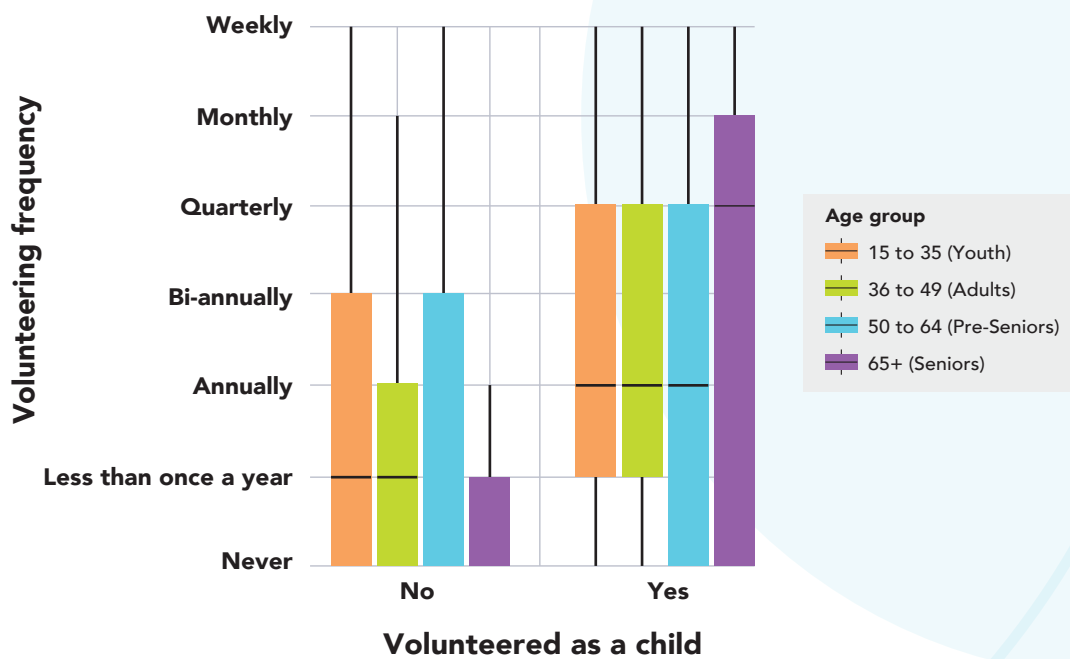
...I would say it was my father who influenced me to be more generous. And also, during my secondary school time, I joined this organization called [SOCIETY]... through this society, I volunteered my time to help those people.

### • 58-year-old unemployed

# EARLY INTRODUCTION TO GIVING

We investigated further by asking people in Singapore whether they had volunteered or donated money before the age of 13. We then tested whether these responses predicted their giving behaviours in 2023.

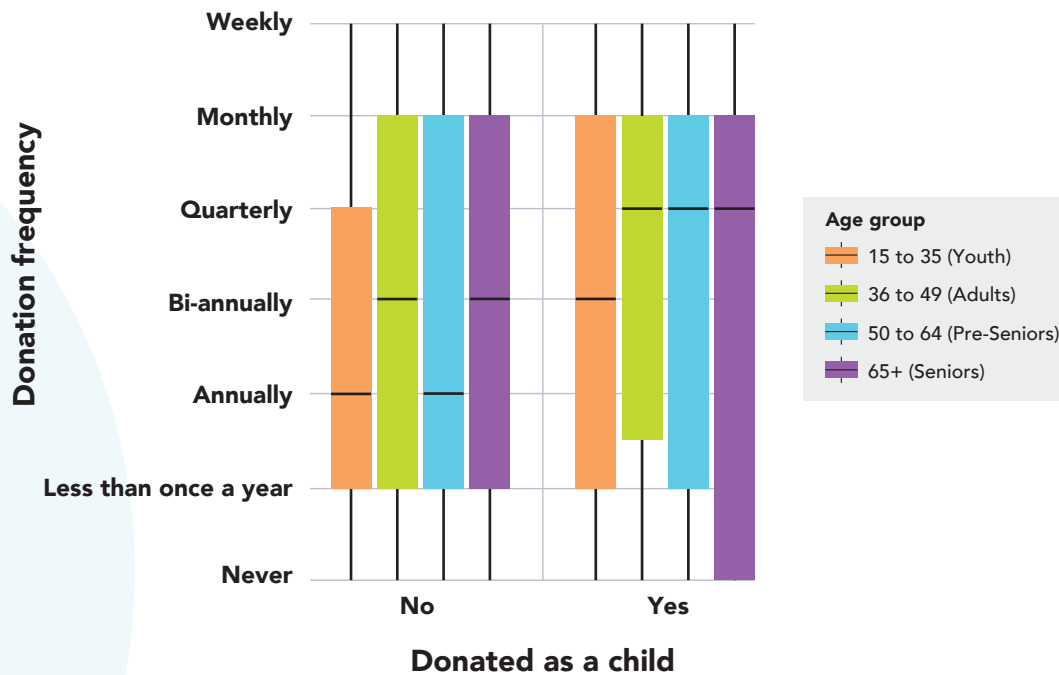
Indeed, both donating and volunteering as a child predicted how often people give as adults. Having a childhood experience of volunteering had a small, but statistically significant, effect on how often people volunteered in the past 12 months; while a childhood experience of donating explained a smaller, but still statistically significant, proportion of how often they donate. In other words, individuals who participated in volunteering activities as children were more likely to have volunteered more frequently in 2023. The same can be said of childhood donors—those who donated before the age of 13 were more likely to have donated more frequently in the last 12 months.



These effects varied across age groups. The effect of childhood volunteering was present across all age groups, but actually strongest among seniors. This suggests that childhood volunteering may have formed a lifelong habit, rather than simply persisting in younger age groups who have experienced it more recently.



# EARLY INTRODUCTION TO GIVING

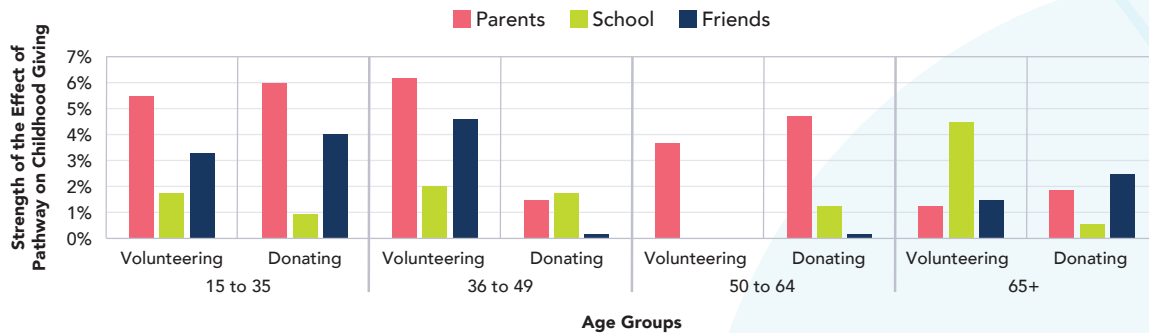


Conversely, childhood donation showed the opposite pattern, with the strongest effect among youth (under 35), and a weaker effect in older age groups.

Based on this evidence alone, it is still unclear whether childhood volunteering itself forms a lifelong habit, or whether it is merely a symptom of prosocial values transmitted by parents in childhood, which then persist in adulthood.

# EARLY INTRODUCTION TO GIVING

**Strength of effect of different pathways of childhood giving on giving in 2023**



One way of examining this is by looking at who introduced children to giving. We asked those who reported participating in childhood giving whether their parents, friends, school, or other caregivers were responsible for introducing them to volunteerism and donation.

When it came to donation, parental exposure was key for most age groups, although for seniors and youth, introduction to donation by friends was also an important predictor.

As for volunteering, for those under 49 years of age, parental introduction was the clearest predictor of adult volunteering. But for seniors, parental introduction had little effect; instead, introduction to volunteering at school was the key predictor of current volunteering.

This suggests that childhood giving is not merely an effect of other values transmitted within families; instead, exposure to giving even from outside the family is associated with long-term behavioural changes.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Policies should be explored to provide opportunities for exposure to giving in childhood, as a long-term investment in creating lifelong habits of giving.
- Further research should be conducted to understand the causal link between giving in childhood and in adulthood

## Strength of Religious / Spiritual Affiliation

Singapore is a country marked by a vibrant multi-religious community, with around 80% of Singaporeans adhering to one faith or another, according to the 2020 census. Many faiths encourage various forms of giving—from Christian charity, to Buddhist dana, to zakat in Islam. But does the prominence of religion in one's life actually increase participation in giving behaviours? To find out, we included a series of questions about religious affiliation, and evaluated whether these predicted different forms of giving.

The questions we chose were based on the concept of religiosity. This is a concept used in psychology to refer to the overall strength of a person's affiliation to a religion, or to a sense of spirituality. Religiosity can be measured in multiple ways. One approach is to measure it behaviourally—for example, how often does a person attend religious services? Another approach is to measure it subjectively—for example, how important does a person feel religion is in their life? Each approach has benefits and drawbacks, so we chose to measure religiosity in more than one way.

The results of our model show that those who subjectively perceived religion to be more important in their lives, and those who attend religious services regularly, were more likely to donate more often.

But a closer look reveals more complex patterns. Those who say religion is important to them, but rarely attend religious services (i.e., excluding funerals and weddings), were far less likely to have donated in the past year.

One interpretation of these results is that because many faiths ask for charitable donations during religious services, attendance of services might simply predict donation because people are more frequently asked to donate. If that were the case, we might not expect to see a similar effect for volunteering. Yet religiosity predicted frequency of volunteering, too.

How can we best explain the patterns we observe here?

**Anthropologists and psychologists have argued that participation in religious services leads to group bonding and prosocial behaviour in numerous ways.** Key aspects of many religious ceremonies, including music, synchronised motions such as prayer or dancing, and the presence of fellow parishioners making visible displays of faith, have all been shown to trigger psychological and physiological processes which strengthen group bonds. Especially when combined with prosocial moral messages conveyed by major faiths, these bonds may then lead directly to prosocial behaviour, such as giving.

This group bonding helps explain why frequency of religious attendance might drive giving behaviour, but also why this effect disappeared for those who said religion was important to them, but did not attend services. As one FGD participant remarked, "where did I start... I guess in a church environment, because we're encouraged to reach out and to show our love" [55-year-old employee].

## STRENGTH OF RELIGIOUS / SPIRITUAL AFFILIATION

**Thus, religious giving may have much to teach us about secular giving, too.** If giving is engendered by participation in bonding activities with fellow givers, then it may be that secular giving can leverage similar mechanisms. For example, many groups of sports fans, such as football supporters, also engage in intense bonding activity, even including singing and synchronised movement. Could the bonds in such groups be leveraged to engender giving behaviour? More broadly, the concept of a 'giving circle', in which friends or associates club together to give collectively, might similarly take advantage of bonds between group members to support prosocial behaviour.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Encourage the formation of tightly-knit communities of givers**  
Whether through giving circles, school alumni associations, or sports clubs, close bonds between members may be a powerful motivator of shared giving activities.

## Interest in Social Issues

We sought to understand the relationship between awareness and concern with social issues and participation in giving activities. To do so, we measured respondents' (1) level of interest in current affairs, and (2) factual knowledge of social issues including income inequality, ageing, and climate change, with the goal of predicting the likelihood of volunteerism and donation among individuals in the past 12 months using a combination of these factors.

There is **insufficient evidence** to show that having accurate knowledge of social issues predicts increased **volunteering or donating** frequencies in the past 12 months. In other words, knowing more about social issues does not make one **more likely** to have volunteered or donated more often in the last year.

Interest in social issues, on the other hand, did predict volunteering and donating. Individuals who **expressed a keen interest** in staying informed about current affairs by either reading or watching the news, or contemplating or engaging in discussions on social issues, tended to have been more active volunteers and donors as well—specifically, the likelihood of actively (i.e., more frequently) volunteering or donating increases along with one's level of interest in social issues.

This appears to be consistent with the finding that the most prominent motivations for volunteering and donating are altruistic ones. If giving is mainly driven by a desire to help, then it stands to reason that those with a stronger interest in the needs of others are more likely to engage in giving.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Media organisations can help build a culture of giving by integrating giving opportunities into their reporting of events, thus strengthening the link between giving and awareness of needs.

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# **BARRIERS TO GIVING**

**The Importance of Trust  
Resources and  
Perceived Constraints**

## The Importance of Trust

With increased digital literacy and awareness of public information campaigns warning against falling victim to fraud, concerns about scams appear to be at the forefront of many people's minds. Our FGD participants highlighted this as a major concern when considering whether to make donations.

### Fear of scams and perceptions of donation scams – selected FGD quotes

...barriers I think is also scam for... monetary donation. Because I feel that recently scammers are becoming [smarter] in trying to cheat our money... [it's] very hard to differentiate whether this person is a scam or not. So, it's actually very hard to give monetary donations.

#### • 23-year-old student

Nowadays there's a lot scam going on. Even to donate, it's like sometimes, I do get a bit wary... is it true or not? You know, it could be someone just standing around the streets, with a box and... pushing me to do it... This one I think goes far beyond just transparency, really. It's more like trust [in] people... because there's a lot of different types of donation... If you just walk down the street... It could be from a religion, it could be from the old age, it could be schools... what is true anymore[?]

#### • 27-year-old employee

...with the recent scam cases, everyone's becoming a skeptic... sometimes when... I do donate... I'm afraid I also don't know where the money will go. Like if I pass [money to] all those tissue paper sellers I'm not sure what they're going to do with it. Who knows... I've seen it before... some went to actually go and buy beer or gamble it away...

#### • 30-year-old unemployed

...you know, those on the street where they... ask you to do the donation... Like what [Participant PG2A4\_1] saying is like, there are lot of [scams] outside... which I don't really trust... if they ask you for donation.

#### • 51-year-old employee

I think we have to be very careful in giving in this era, because... [scams] actually spoiled the market... [even] though you want to give... we have to be very careful... check before you give... otherwise you get yourself into more trouble.

#### • 63-year-old retiree

Respondents to our quantitative survey echoed these sentiments. Fear of scams was cited as a major reason for not donating by 32% of those who did not donate in 2023—a 9%-point increase since 2021. This pattern held across age groups.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF TRUST

Similarly, we looked at whether trust in charitable organisations predicted frequency of making donations. Having a negative or distrustful perception of charities in general—believing them to make poor use of funds or otherwise seeing them as unreliable—was a clear negative predictor of frequency of making donations. This concern was also highlighted by our FGD participants.

### Negative or distrustful perceptions of charities – selected FGD quotes

...if I do donate to particular organizations, especially financially, especially with, monetary, I just have this imagination that, the organization will use the money for something else. I don't know, I may be wrong. I'm not saying that that's what's going to happen, but... I imagine about the [National Kidney Foundation (NKF)] thing... So... if I do want to give money, I want to really know... where the money goes.

#### • 33-year-old unemployed

...if everyone... remember previously when the [NKF had]... like a scam or whatever that they call it due to the CEO not taking the donor's money seriously. And it really [made] a very negative impact on some of my friends that they say, "This NKF is such a big national organization, and yet they can misuse them, the funds from the donations as well as donation drive, as well as the individual donors... what [might] other NGOs or smaller NGOs be doing with our money and all that?"

#### • 44-year-old unemployed

There is actually [an] obstacle... [if the organisation makes] us [lose] faith in them, we'll stop donating to them... a real-life example is NKF. When I first started working, I was donating regularly to NKF and then the scandal happened, and I immediately [stopped] all my donation to them... And then even till now I don't donate to them anymore... [once] trust... is lost... it may never come back.

#### • 45-year-old employee

...I had been donating to [NKF] for many years when I was younger, during my early days, until the saga of the NKF scandal came to light. And after that, I stopped. Because somehow the trust was broken... So, I'm very wary of donating, just giving and not knowing where the money would go.

#### • 62-year-old retiree



# THE IMPORTANCE OF TRUST

Finally, we examined whether not only trust in charities, but also general trust directed at others, might influence giving behaviour. Specifically, we measured respondents' level of trust in members of social outgroups, such as other religions, other nationalities, or simply those outside their social circle. Trust in outgroups was also a clear predictor of both how often people donated and how often they volunteered.

Thus not only our FGD participants, but also our quantitative measures of trust in charities, and trust directed at outgroups, provide evidence that lack of trust is an important barrier to giving, and especially to donation. These converging lines of evidence suggest that working to increase public confidence in charitable organisations is a crucial next step in building Singapore's giving culture.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Charities, fundraising platforms and government should work to establish clear signals of credibility and trustworthiness to increase public confidence in the nonprofit sector.
  2. Charities may also benefit from clearer, more credible communication about how they make use of funds, and of the impact of contributions on beneficiaries.
- NVPC is working to implement these recommendations by providing support to charities on its giving platform, giving.sg, as well as through a range of training programmes. As fundraising and communication competency improves across the sector, we believe public confidence in charities will continue to strengthen.

# Barriers to Giving

## Resources and Perceived Constraints

### FINANCES

**We asked respondents about their financial concerns in several ways. This included not only a direct income question, but also whether they perceived donation to be a financial strain, and how important they rated financial concerns as a barrier to donating.**

Financial concerns were the most popularly cited reason for not donating. This included those who cited a need to save up for priorities—a need which was statistically more prevalent among youths than other age groups.

Our measures of perceived and actual financial constraints were both clear predictors of how often people donate. In other words, perceived and actual financial constraints were an important barrier to how frequently people engaged in the act of donation, regardless of the monetary quantities involved.

Looking at the monetary value of donations, the effect of financial constraints was even stronger. While personal monthly income was a moderate predictor of how much people donate, income together with perceived financial constraints constituted a clear, and substantially stronger, predictor of how much Singaporeans donate. That is to say, perceptions of financial insecurity or financial constraints are a powerful barrier to donation, even when taking the effect of income into account. As illustrated by an FGD participant who shared about the various financial constraints they faced at different life stages, “definitely when we were younger, we [could not] donate as much with our limited [finances], and then as we progress, we are able to afford more, and then we donate more. And then subsequently when we have house and then, additional financial responsibility comes in and with kids... our ability to donate is limited again” [30-year-old homemaker].

# RESOURCES AND PERCEIVED CONSTRAINTS

## TIME

**Time-related constraints were the most commonly cited reason for not volunteering in 2023. This was statistically significantly higher in younger age groups, who expressed that their educational, professional, and personal obligations hindered their ability to engage in volunteer activities.**

Indeed, taking all of the cited time-related barriers together (needing more time for family commitments, work and school, or other priorities; volunteering schedules being too inflexible), these barriers are a moderate predictor of how often people in Singapore volunteer, and a strong predictor of how many hours they volunteer. As one FGD participant remarked, "...I've really tried, I've tried signing up for volunteering, you know, but I cannot give my time. It's so difficult for me to give my time, because of what I do, and this is going to be my third baby, so it's going to get more hectic." [33-year-old employee].

This effect differed by age group. Time constraints most strongly predicted volunteering hours for under 35-year-olds. This was followed by a slightly weaker effect for 36- to 49-year-olds, then 50- to 64-year-olds, and finally 65+ year-olds. Thus, while time constraints were important for volunteering across age groups, the effect was strongest in younger age groups, and declined with age.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. NPOs should explore offering options for micro-donations and micro-volunteerism. Such forms of giving may more easily allow for donation and volunteerism to fall within existing routines and budgets.
  - An example of micro-donation is giving at check-out counters where the amount paid is rounded to the nearest dollar, and the rounded amount donated.
2. Steps should be taken to raise public awareness around alternative ways of helping others or advancing a cause, which may require less commitment of money and time—such as those discussed in Giving Outside the Box.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Recommendations for NPOs, giving platforms, and policymakers

**Trust is a key driver of donation**

**Those with a stronger affiliation to religion / spirituality in their daily lives donated and volunteered more frequently**

**Seeing volunteering as an effective way to help others is the clearest driver of volunteering**

**Among volunteers, a feeling that their volunteering makes a difference explained 26% of volunteering frequency**

### **Strengthen trust in NPOs**

Highlight IPC status and other signs of credibility on platforms such as giving.sg; work with sector experts to enhance the credibility of campaigns.

### **Leverage the role of affiliation in religious & secular communities**

- Work with religious leaders to cultivate giving behaviours.
- Encourage approaches like Giving Circles which create tightly bonded giving communities.

### **Balance recognition & reward**

Frame volunteering as primarily an altruistic act; reward volunteers with social recognition, but not monetary compensation.

### **Shape design of the volunteer experience**

Volunteers should be given work that shows them the tangible impact of their efforts.

## Recommendations for media and educational institutions

**Givers who keep up to date with current affairs and think about social issues were also more frequent volunteers and donors**

**Individuals who volunteered or donated before the age of 13 were more likely to have done so in the past 12 months**

### **Media organisations can work to integrate giving opportunities into their reporting of events**

Strengthen the link between awareness of needs and actions in media content.

Educational institutions and government can explore programmes introducing children to giving

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