



# *Giving:* A Shared Inheritance

African American Giving & Volunteering in Metro Atlanta

**Findings of Inspiration:  
A Celebration of the Giving Spirit of Atlanta**



**THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION**  
FOR GREATER ATLANTA, INC.



## ***Our Goal***

*To increase the capacity of metro Atlanta's nonprofit community*

*To engage African Americans as donors and volunteers*

*To strengthen our communities and families*

*“To the extent that the continued growth of volunteering and giving in metro Atlanta will include an increasing percentage of its African American community, there is hope for a brighter tomorrow.”*

Alicia Philipp, President, The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta

## Introduction

Atlanta’s uniquely generous spirit has been evident since its inception. A relatively young city when compared to metropolitan areas of comparable size, Atlanta’s rich heritage and productive energy have long made it a sought after destination for visionary individuals. For generations, Atlanta has been a haven for those who seek to become involved in activities for the betterment of the larger community; whether in business, education, politics, religion, culture, sports, entertainment, and, in one of its fastest growing areas, the nonprofit sector.

In a recent report, Atlanta, Georgia was cited as the metropolitan area where new charities increased at the second highest rate in the country\*. With more than 12,000 nonprofit organizations serving the needs of a burgeoning community, it is clear that the giving spirit of Atlantans has contributed to making the city what it is today, and more importantly, what it will be tomorrow.

The whole of a city is greater than the sum of its parts. Yet to fully understand the true potential of Atlanta area philanthropy, it is important to understand the individuals who comprise the heart and blood, hands and feet of the dedicated masses. African Americans comprise much of the metro Atlanta population, and the city of Atlanta ranks third nationally in total African American population. As a group whose income, wealth and philanthropic activity are increasing annually, African Americans are an important force in building and sustaining Atlanta communities and families.

To leverage the philanthropic power of this influential group requires an understanding of the extent to which their unique cultural, regional and religious heritage impacts their donation of time and money to charitable causes. There have been numerous national and a few city-specific studies exploring similar questions, but none focused on the African American citizenry of metropolitan Atlanta. Based upon data from four years of research, this report’s findings reveal a cause for celebration.

\*Atlanta Charity Growth Second Best in Nation – Atlanta Business Chronicle, 2/2005

\*\*US Census 2000

\*\*\*Charles Stewart Mott Foundation / James Joseph: Inspired by Mentors, Heroes

## The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta: Our Role in the Study

The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta (TCF) knows first-hand the giving spirit of Atlanta. Since 1951, TCF has worked to match donors with organizations serving their interests. TCF also helps to educate families and communities on reaching their charitable goals, which ultimately builds Atlanta's social capital, improving the quality of life for everyone in the region.

Because TCF has intimate experience with Atlanta's rich heritage of extending a hand in times of need and understands its societal impact, the Foundation recognized the value in learning more about the nuances of local African American giving. The decision was made to embark upon what eventually became the most comprehensive study ever conducted on the topic in metro Atlanta. In launching *Giving: A Shared Inheritance*, TCF sought to promote philanthropy and contribute to a healthier, more vibrant community, equipped to reap the full benefit of a dynamic and responsive segment of our population.

To ensure a broad and productive application of the knowledge gained, TCF assembled an impressive team of experts and advisors representing varied aspects of philanthropy, academia, business and civic community. A Design Team and Advisory Committee, comprised of local and national thought leaders, poured over the research findings and brought deep knowledge and real-world experience to enrich the context for the study. In addition, they carried the dialogue created by the research into the communities in which they lived and worked, helping to keep all participants in touch with the relevant societal pulse. At every step along the way, the Design Team, Advisory Committee and TCF Board of Directors actively involved themselves to ask the critical questions, helping to design the path to understanding.



# The Path to Understanding: The Research Methodology

## Phase I – A Broad View

Since 2000, TCF has commissioned a series of quantitative research studies to survey the trends, motivations and beliefs of metro Atlantans in the work of strengthening the Atlanta community. Through this research, the Nonprofit Studies Program at the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies of Georgia State University conducted thousands of interviews investigating the patterns and trends of philanthropy throughout metro Atlanta, including but not limited to the African American community.

Partnering with the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation, TCF segmented African American statistical data from the quantitative research to draw conclusions about the philanthropic behavior of metro Atlanta African Americans.

## Phase 2 – A Deeper View

After closely analyzing the Phase I research, TCF and its team of advisors sought to confirm and better understand some of the findings that were emerging. The Foundation decided to launch a qualitative phase of study that would delve more deeply into the key issues highlighted by Phase I. Partnering with The Coca-Cola Company, UPS and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, TCF commissioned Schapiro Research Group to conduct six focus groups and 30 one-on-one, one-hour interviews of active and emerging African American philanthropists.

African American interview respondents were chosen because of their current philanthropic activity as well as their inclination to participate in philanthropic activity in the future. Interviewees represented the diverse geographic and employment sectors of metro Atlanta. Because a driving force behind the study was the future of African American philanthropy, most interviews were conducted with younger professionals and emerging philanthropists.

The six focus groups were chosen by demographics, representing a broader spectrum of philanthropists than those chosen for the interviews. However, each two-hour focus group included a balance of African American participants who had and had not given to a charitable cause in the previous year.

Focus Group Composition
Age: Younger (18-30)
Age: Middle (31-50)
Age: Older (51+)
Residents of African American Communities
Frequent Churchgoers
Corporate Employees

The qualitative research sought to both build upon the knowledge gained during the first phase and validate emerging assumptions. This approach gave participants the ability to freely communicate information that is important for understanding the root causes of individual actions. This two-phased research enjoys the combined benefits of the quantitative (wide) and qualitative (deep) methodologies, generating information that clarifies, but also ventures outside, the parameters of the first phase.

While much has been learned, the Foundation recognizes that continued discussion and introspection is warranted. To that end, a local research firm has donated its services to provide additional online research focused on metro Atlanta's African American communities of faith, exploring further the key findings brought to light by Phase II. The journey continues.

# Revelations: The Findings and Their Significance

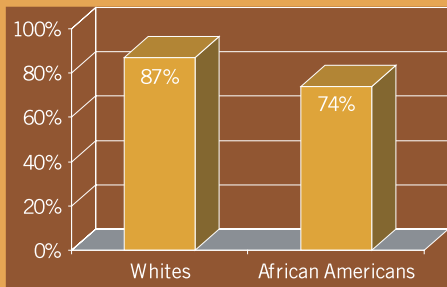
## African Americans in Atlanta Do Give and Volunteer

Perhaps the most significant finding of Giving: A Shared Inheritance is that 74% of African Americans in metro Atlanta give of their resources and 43% volunteer their time. This statistic goes counter to the perception, by some, that African Americans as a whole do not get involved to help their communities.

When compared to Whites who give, African Americans gave a statistically similar percentage of their income to charitable causes – between 2 and 4%. When measuring formal volunteering, levels were even more similar (African Americans 43% and Whites 46%). It should be noted that the first phase of Giving: A Shared Inheritance measured formal philanthropy (giving or volunteering to nonprofit organizations) and not informal philanthropy (giving and volunteering not connected to an organized nonprofit). Phase II revealed that informal philanthropy is indeed the predominant form of charitable activity among the majority of African Americans in Atlanta.

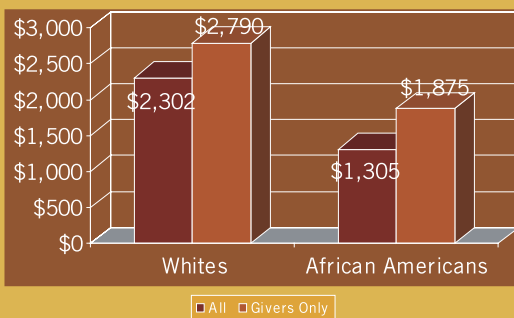
### Probability of Giving

Metro Atlanta: 2001-2002



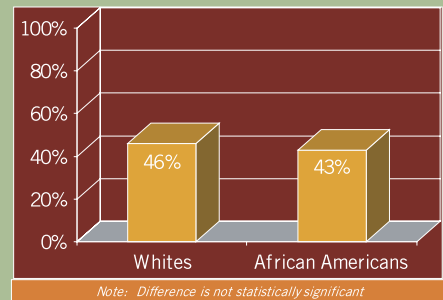
### Levels of Giving

Metro Atlanta: 2001-2002



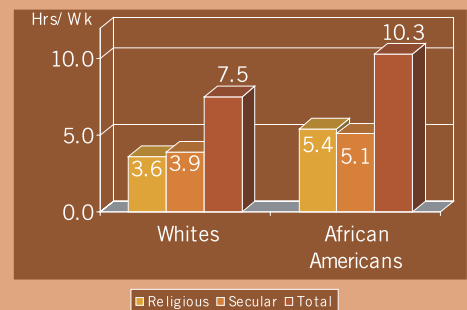
### Probability of Volunteering

Metro Atlanta: 2001-2002



### Levels of Volunteering Religious vs. Secular Hours of Volunteers

Metro Atlanta: 2001-2002



## Community and Responsibility

The undercurrents of Community and Responsibility are the context in which African American philanthropists express the important issues tied to giving. Within the context of Community and Responsibility, the following areas categorize other core findings of the research:

- Identity and philanthropy
- Faith and philanthropy
- Need vs. ability
- Formal vs. informal

## Defining the Value of Community

Community refers to a group of people who are connected to one another through social bonds and/or geographic location. For African Americans in metro Atlanta, being part of a community means:

- You are aware of who is in your community
- You are likely to trust and rely on members of your community
- There is a collective interest in seeing that your community thrives

Community includes family members, friends, neighbors and sometimes casual acquaintances. Also, when referencing the “African American community” the definition extends to the shared legacy of a people and includes a connectedness to race. The importance of community is constant throughout the research findings.

*“Just being a part of a community has always been what we’ve done. You might not give to an organization, but you might give to your next-door neighbor.”*

## Defining the Value of Responsibility

African Americans view their philanthropic responsibility as an interactive experience:

1. To give selflessly of time and money; and
2. To choose well the recipients of your generosity.

In formal philanthropy, nonprofit organizations assist donors in the responsibility to “give well” by maintaining ethical standards, reporting on the use of contributions and sharing openly their business processes and practices. In informal philanthropy, “giving well” means helping friends, family, neighbors and others whenever there is tangible evidence that they are in need. Giving well includes financial assistance, personal assistance or companionship.

In African American philanthropy, community and responsibility must exist together for the greatest levels of charitable activity to be achieved. When one exists without the other, African Americans are less likely to give freely of themselves. Organizations seeking to increase their capacity to engage African American philanthropists will be successful only if they are able to channel and connect these two powerful values.

*“We are responsible for the world we live in and we actually have to put in to make a change.”*

# Identity and Philanthropy

For metro Atlanta African Americans, many aspects of philanthropy are tied to personal identity. Not only does the respondent's identity play a role in how, where and why they give, but it is also important to note that, as has been documented with all Americans, many African Americans do not view themselves as "philanthropists".

## What does the word "philanthropy" make you think of?

"People who have a lot of money who use the money for the benefit of the community."

"When I hear of philanthropy, I think of the rich more so...a lot of these philanthropic endeavors really don't reach the community in the grass-roots sense."

"I think a lot of people's perception of philanthropy, if you wouldn't define it, they would say it's the Gates Foundation. It's the people that give large amounts of money. I think for Black folks, as far as like just doing for one another, we always do that."

### *The reasons African Americans give are:*

- (1) help the community,*
- (2) sense of duty,*
- (3) the organization supports their beliefs,*
- (4) charities are more effective than government or business,*
- (5) the organization helped them or someone they knew.*

Even African Americans that participate in high levels of giving and volunteering do not view themselves as philanthropists because they believe philanthropists to be people with exorbitant wealth. Defined by the size of the gift, a broader definition of philanthropy did not initially resonate for them on a personal level. However, once philanthropy was defined as all levels and types of giving and volunteering, the 'disconnect' invariably disappeared and they expressed pride that they were philanthropists.

African American philanthropists hold themselves to high levels of responsibility to ensure meaningful contributions, or "giving well." Nonprofit organizations would do well to assist the African American to "cultivate the philanthropist within", by addressing the issues of responsible giving.

## African American Identity

African Americans are driven to give and volunteer by a deep-rooted association with the successes and challenges of the African American heritage. Particularly for those living in African American communities, this heritage has a powerful influence on the impetus and nature of charitable activity. The need to prioritize giving by identifying needs in one's own community, that may lead to an undercounting of African American philanthropy if it does not include informal giving and volunteering.

*"I don't think I want to give back to [my college] by giving them money every year to go toward this huge account of money. I would want...something like that to [go] to a student."*

The compelling urge to help one's own is amplified by the widely held belief that the quality of African American communities is in crisis. This finding crystallizes the notion that for African Americans in metro Atlanta, responsibility to their identity and community are inextricable to the shaping and manifestation of their philanthropy. African American philanthropists are sensitive to perceived racial overtones in large-scale formal giving efforts. This explains the reason for more informal rather than formal philanthropy, where donors can be more personally involved to ensure that the recipients of their generosity are taken care of equitably.





Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) inspire a unique type of giving from African Americans, with a preference for individual student sponsorships rather than contributions to academic funds or endowments. The primary reason given for directing funds in this way is that many college-educated African Americans can relate directly to the experience of being a student that has been given an opportunity to attend college.

### Faith and Philanthropy

The church, and specifically Protestant Christianity, is a dominant factor in African American philanthropy in metro Atlanta. Participants talk more about the church than about religion. This is because the church represents a body of people that encourages specific behaviors of members, sets norms and rewards good acts. Whether giving to, through or outside the church, the church and its changing role in society are paramount to providing a frame of reference for the African American philanthropist. African Americans in metro Atlanta are inspired by the spiritual values rooted in the church, which guide their philanthropic activities.



## Giving To the Church

A large amount of philanthropic behavior within the church supports the basic functions of the church, whether by donating money to the general fund or by volunteering to distribute church bulletins. Tithing, giving a percentage of one's income with the goal being a minimum of 10%, is the most easily recognized form of

giving to the church. While many respondents mentioned tithing in relation to church donations, it was emphasized that tithing requires a deep trust in the church and brings with it the shared responsibility to use the funds wisely. The African American family and church collectively instill tithing behavior as "just something you do." Those who do not regularly tithe say that they more often "give what they can." Those who tithe do so without regard to the amount of available funds, believing that their good deeds will be reciprocated.

*"Within the church...there could be some kind of after school tutorial where a person could volunteer and...help students having trouble."*

While some told stories of church-related pressure to give, most study participants cited the long-lasting lessons of charitable giving imparted in

church where philanthropy is the norm. African American church members are taught at an early age that giving of your time and money is a part of being a "good" Christian.

## Giving Through the Church

People donate through the church to support a humanitarian effort as a church body, such as feeding the homeless, providing facilities for a local sports league or supporting a nonprofit project. Much of the emphasis on giving through the church was in the form of volunteerism, which tends to have a more profound effect on the individual philanthropist because it engenders long-term relationships. Other forms include providing facilities for use by nonprofits. When donations are solicited through the church, giving is abundant; however, members are less likely to become involved on a personal level over time. Appeals for monetary donations tend to support one-time projects such as helping a needy family or helping to build a playground.

## Giving Outside the Church

While church-influenced giving and volunteering involves programs partnering with or promoted by the church, most African Americans do not regard the church's role to be that of a charitable clearinghouse. Endorsements from church leaders or passive outreach (postings referencing charitable causes not related to the church) were not a driving force in African American philanthropy. However, the desire or responsibility to give, even outside the church, is cited as having been inspired by an upbringing in the church proving the church's strong effect on philanthropic behavior.

## The Church as a part of Community

African Americans hold churches accountable to spend wisely and to reinvest in the community, just as they hold nonprofit organizations accountable. There is a growing perception among African Americans that many churches are no longer focusing their charitable efforts in their immediate community for two reasons:

1. "Mega churches", consisting of congregants who drive outside their communities to attend church in another community. For many African Americans, this violates a fundamental characteristic of the church as a community asset.
2. The perception that some church leaders are directing too much time and resources outside the community.

Over time, these two trends can result in diminished trust and reduce the funds and time donated to and through churches.

## Needs and Ability

The African American philanthropist responds especially powerfully to direct need, often despite the availability of discretionary funds. Because of this strong response to tangible, visible need, African American philanthropy tends to target people rather than organizations. With the goal of supporting the larger community, African American philanthropy responds to individual need by:

1. Giving both time and money;
2. Giving regardless of their own finances; and
3. Giving without expectation for tax relief or special recognition.

With regard to need, the issue of responsibility plays a role in that African Americans are motivated to help individuals within their communities who are in need because they feel African Americans are more likely to be overlooked by other charities. This is not to imply that giving to a cause ignores individual need, but that need established through a cause often intersects with need established through an individual. Giving thus becomes an intimate process by which the philanthropist becomes familiar with the recipient, and with his or her needs and progress.

One theme regarding ability and philanthropy that is pervasive in the findings is the acknowledged “struggle” of the day-to-day experience of being African American in America. Regardless of socioeconomic status, for African Americans, the decision to donate time or money in the context of this shared struggle minimizes the challenges of giving when compared to the satisfaction experienced while giving.

*“Even if I don’t get a thank you...the person’s expression and response can tell you that it’s appreciated. That’s more important than anything else.”*



## Formal and Informal Philanthropy

Study participants held clearly distinct views about formal vs. informal philanthropy, though they rarely described the two using these terms\*:

Formal	Informal
Charitable organization present	Charitable organization absent
Cold and institutional	Warm and personal
Planned	Impromptu
Pressured	Inspired

\* Study respondent definitions

The expectation of accountability increases when formal philanthropy is involved. African Americans are not fully satisfied with the current state of accountability in charitable organizations. Respondents expressed the need for nonprofit organizations to prove their legitimacy and to earn African American trust. African American donors and volunteers also seek transparency as to how the gifts are used. They want to become a more direct part of the giving process and to have assurances that the anticipated benefits will be realized.

*“It’s about how I’m approached and who I’m approached by. The level of credibility they have...If they actually show that they’ve done something with the money that I think is worthwhile, then I’ll give.”*

Perhaps the most telling explanation of the preference for informal giving is the notion that philanthropic planning is counter to a basic tenant of giving: the responsibility to respond or react to need. The idea of planning philanthropy (other than workplace campaigns or tithing) was incongruous to many of the study participants because they believe people cannot predict need. Responding to need is a reactive process. For most participants, financial planning using a financial expert is an act that most believe reserved for the wealthy. African Americans who have long-term financial plans, regardless of status, think of it more as a way to use money wisely than as a tool to achieve thier philanthropic goals.

Both formal and informal philanthropy are bound by the same basic rules: helping the community; watching over fellow African Americans; the response to give and to see that giving is done well; and addressing need.



# Shaping the Future: Action Items for the Common Good

The core values of community and responsibility in African American philanthropy create a tapestry of giving that ensures its own vitality in the future. It is not only African Americans in the higher socioeconomic range that give, but hundreds of thousands who feel compelled to give unselfishly of their time and money. Understanding and considering the characteristics that the influence giving spirit of African Americans in metro Atlanta can provide the basis for a more inclusive and productive community.

To increase the capacity of metro Atlanta's nonprofit community to engage African Americans as donors and volunteers to strengthen our communities and families...

## Atlanta's nonprofits must

- Establish legitimacy – Build relationships of trust, seek referrals from trusted leaders in the African American community and maintain a consistent, visible and active presence.
- Address community need – Show how the assistance provided will positively impact the community.
- Communicate clearly and frequently – To explain how contributions are being used. Use two-way communication and be sure to listen to the concerns of the community.
- Partner with the Faith Community – Form partnerships with churches and other faith-based organizations to share ideas and resources, with a focus on offering volunteer opportunities.

## Atlanta's Communities of Faith must

- Serve communities – Offer resources as community assets. Become actively involved in addressing specific community needs as they arise.
- Maintain focus on service – Place emphasis on service to the community.
- Partner with nonprofits – Build substantive relationships with nonprofit organizations that support causes members care about. Leverage faith-motivated community action with social service expertise.

## Civic and Community Organizations and HBCUs must

- Ask effectively – Communicate with potential donors and volunteers by regularly educating them on individual needs and the ways in which they can help.
- Help people connect with the cause – Create a personal connection with potential donors and volunteers.
- Link gifts with individual need – Tell a story of hope, one that centers on a real person or family. Demonstrate the differences that can be made in lives.

## Financial Advisors must

- Address public perceptions – Educate African American clients about the way in which financial planning can help people of all incomes to make better financial decisions, build wealth and achieve philanthropic goals.
- Treat philanthropy as an investment – Provide expertise in long-term financial planning that includes philanthropic goals. Provide the insight and tools that acknowledge and capture informal philanthropy.

## African Americans in Atlanta must know

- The myriad examples of accomplishment, strength and unity that would not have been possible were it not for personal giving and volunteering by African Americans.
- Where to go for information about how to get involved, and about which organizations have been proven to have positive impact in their communities.
- That African American philanthropists are not just the upper crust of the community – that there hundreds of thousands at all income levels who have felt compelled to give unselfishly of their time and money.



## Resources and Contributors

THE ARTHUR M. BLANK FAMILY FOUNDATION



 The Annie E. Casey Foundation



We extend a special acknowledgement to Georgia Power  
for its generous printing of this report.



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