



Trust in action: Your favorite nonprofits know what they need

If you've supported a particular charitable organization for many years, and perhaps even served on its board of directors, you are likely familiar with some basic concepts of "trust-based philanthropy," even if you didn't know that's what it is called.

As a consistent supporter of the nonprofit organizations you love, you know an organization's chances of success are greatest when its leadership and talented staff can deploy resources in the ways they believe will best fulfill the mission. This, in turn, sometimes translates into an organization placing a high value on what are called

“unrestricted” donations, meaning that the organization can use the dollars where they are needed most.

A simple example of this is when a donor writes a check to a food pantry and instructs that the money be used to purchase canned goods, but the food pantry’s leadership knows that what they really need at the moment is to fix the roof or hire a staff member to help sort food before the pantry will be in a position to accept more canned goods.

Indeed, [multi-year, unrestricted funding](#) remains a hallmark of trust-based philanthropy because it gives nonprofits flexibility to respond to changing circumstances, invest in organizational capacity, and plan beyond the next grant cycle. But unrestricted gifts are only one component of the overall trust-based philanthropy concept.

The broader model is designed to strengthen the relationships among donors, funders, nonprofits, and the communities they serve. The [Trust-Based Philanthropy Project](#) identifies six core grantmaking practices: providing multi-year unrestricted funding; doing the homework rather than requiring nonprofits to repeatedly prove themselves through burdensome applications; simplifying paperwork; communicating transparently; soliciting and acting on feedback; and offering support beyond the check.

At its heart, though, the idea is simpler than the terminology might suggest: The people closest to the work often know things that donors and funders do not.

That does not mean donors should stop asking questions or paying attention to results. In fact, accountability has become an important part of the [ongoing conversation](#) about trust-based philanthropy. Advocates of the approach emphasize that trust and accountability are not opposites. Rather, the goal is to move toward [mutual accountability](#), where nonprofits can speak candidly about challenges and changing circumstances and donors can learn alongside them instead of relying exclusively on restrictions, applications, and reports.

For an individual donor, you don’t have to adopt an entire philanthropic philosophy to put some of these ideas to work. Consider asking yourself a few simple questions when you support an organization you know and trust. Could an unrestricted gift be more useful than one designated for a particular program? Would a multi-year commitment help the organization plan more effectively? Are you asking the organization what it needs—or telling it what you think it needs? And are there ways you can help beyond your charitable dollars, perhaps through connections, expertise, or advocacy?

So what can you do? For starters, the Community Foundation of West Georgia is here to help! Here are a few ways we can help you dip your toe into trust-based philanthropy.

We can provide insight into local nonprofits and community needs.

Because the CFWG team works closely with nonprofit organizations across our region, we can help you learn more about the nonprofits addressing the issues you care about, including their missions, leadership, current priorities, and the challenges they are working to solve.

We can help you listen and learn before you give.

Sometimes the most valuable question a donor can ask a nonprofit organization is simply, “What do you need most?” We can help facilitate conversations with nonprofit organizations so that you can better understand where your charitable dollars could be most useful—whether that means supporting a particular program, providing unrestricted funding, or making a longer-term commitment.

We can help you create a giving approach that provides both flexibility and confidence.

A donor-advised or other type of fund at the Community Foundation of West Georgia can give you a convenient home for your charitable giving while allowing you to recommend grants over time. Our team can also help you conduct due diligence, evaluate opportunities, and stay connected with the organizations you support—so that trust does not mean giving without information, but rather giving from a place of knowledge and partnership.

We look forward to our next conversation!



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