



Giving Circles Quickstart

An overview of things to think about before starting or joining a giving circle

Giving Circles are...



ACCESSIBLE

Anyone, at any giving level, at any age, in any place, with any funding interest, can start a giving circle. There's no minimum contribution level, no barriers to entry. Giving circles are grassroots, bottom-up, do-it-yourself philanthropy.



POPULAR

Giving circles appeal to an extremely broad range of people, especially minority groups and young people. A 2014 study found that 1 in 8 Americans had participated in a giving circle, while a 2009 study found over 400 giving circles in the United States alone, giving away over \$100 million and engaging more than 12,000 people. Research demonstrates that giving circles influence members to give more, give more strategically, and become more involved in their communities.¹



COLLABORATIVE

Members make decisions together in a democratic process, as peers. Everyone has a say in where the group's money goes, and members leverage and build on each other's diverse perspectives and wisdom.



EMPOWERING

Members combine their dollars to do something bigger (and perhaps better) than they could on their own—with greater scale and impact.



HANDS-ON

Giving circle members take an active, role in the group's decision-making. In some circles, members also provide additional, personal help to grantees through volunteering or pro bono work.



COMMUNAL

A giving circle becomes a community in and of itself. Members build meaningful relationships with each other while also connecting to the communities their grants support, in rich, mutually-beneficial ways.



EDUCATIONAL

Members learn about the needs of their community or focus areas, and become intentional, strategic and proactive givers.

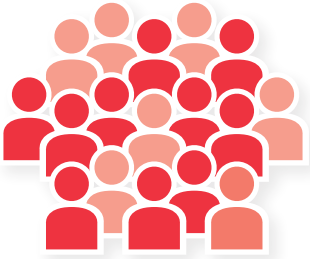
FUN!

Giving circles bring people together to accomplish some serious good while also having fun. They make giving a social experience, combining giving with good people, great conversations, and—we hope—excellent food!



¹ Jessica E. Bearman, "More Giving Together: The Growth and Impact of Giving Circles and Shared Giving," *Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers*, 2007; Evelyn Dean-Olmsted, Sarah Bunin Benor, and Jim Gerstein, "Connected to Give: Community Circles," *Jumpstart*, 2014; Angela Eikenberry, "Giving Circles and the Democratization of Philanthropy," *University of Nebraska at Omaha*, 2005; Angela Eikenberry and Jessica Bearman, "The Impact of Giving Together," *Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers*, 2009.

What Is a Giving Circle?



...GROUP OF PEOPLE...

➤ Giving circles come in all sizes, from 5 people to 100+. We recommend starting with 10-20 members. Many giving circles start with just a few friends or colleagues, and most grow by word of mouth.

Some giving circles are open to anyone who is interested in participating, while others cater specifically to members with common interests and/or demographics:

• **Affinity** ➤ *by religion, ethnicity, culture, sexuality, gender, profession, alumni...*

• **Age / stage of life** ➤ *teens, college students, young professionals, families, baby boomers...*

• **Issue area** ➤ *economic empowerment, homelessness, arts, education, inclusion...*

• **Geographic area** ➤ *giving to a city/state/country, community-based membership...*

A giving circle is a **group of people who pool their charitable donations and decide together where to allocate their money.** In a Jewish giving circle, giving is explicitly inspired by Jewish values and/or supports Jewish or Israeli causes.

...POOL THEIR CHARITABLE DONATIONS...

➤ There are giving circles to fit every budget, from just a few dollars per year to thousands. In some circles, everyone gives the same amount; others have tiered donation levels. The formality and intensity of the grant review and grantmaking process also varies, often (but not always) in step with the size of donations. Some examples of the ways different circles handle their finances:

➤ One member is in charge of collecting cash or checks, and then writes a group check to the grant recipients.

➤ Each member writes individual checks directly to grant recipients.

➤ The circle opens a “collective giving” account at a donor-advised fund or community foundation, which makes all members’ donations tax-deductible. The circle makes grants from the collective giving account.

➤ Circles that also have significant administrative expenses (e.g. staff, travel, events) sometimes seek fiscal sponsorship, a formal arrangement in which a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization sponsors a giving circle. All member contributions—even those intended to pay administrative expenses—become tax-deductible, and the sponsor writes the grant checks.



...DECIDE TOGETHER WHERE TO ALLOCATE THEIR MONEY...

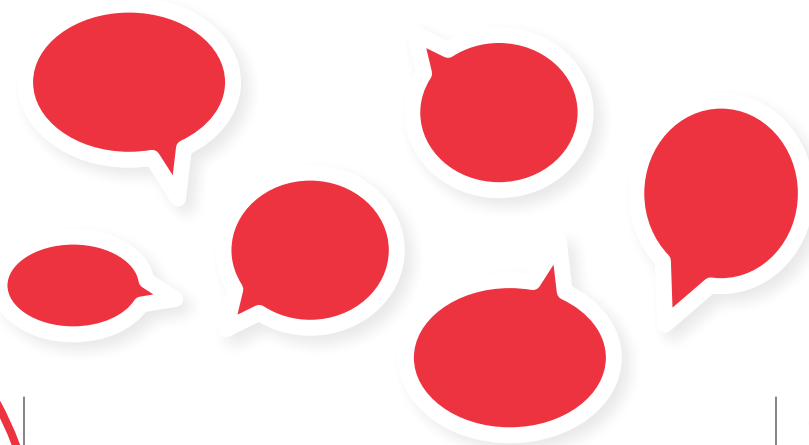
➤ Giving circles use a variety of tools and techniques to understand their members' values and interests, to select the causes and organizations they want to support, and to set up a grant process whose complexity is "right-sized" to use members' and grant applicants' time wisely.

1) Circle Logistics & Asset Mapping

➤ Who should join our circle? How often do we want to meet and where? Who will lead/facilitate our conversations? Who is responsible for which parts of the process? How much money do we bring to the table? Are there non-monetary supports we could also provide, like "social capital" (introductions to our networks) or "intellectual capital" (pro bono professional services or expertise)?

2) Identify Member Values

➤ Why do we give? What are our individual and shared values around giving? What Jewish values motivate us to give?



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3) Establish Mission & Vision

➤ What's the impact we want to make on our members and on the issues we care about? What is our circle's vision for a world affected by our giving, and what are the ways we will support the creation of that world?

4) Select Grant Focus Area(s)

➤ What are the issues that are most important to us to support through our giving circle? What does our community actually need and want? Given

our resources, how can we fill real holes and do the most good?

5) Choose Grant Types and Amounts

➤ How many grants will we give, and how often? What will the minimum and maximum grant amount be? What time period will our grants cover? What kinds of expenses are we willing to support?

6) Find Applicants

➤ Members nominate organizations for grants and/or the circle requests proposals from organizations, either publicly or by invitation only. Amplifier's web platform includes Common Grant Applications and an Organizational Directory, as well as the ability to publicize a circle's "Grant Opportunity."

7) Screen

➤ Circle members screen applicants for quality and fit, with the intensity of the screening and due diligence process varying by circle.

8) Review + Vote

➤ Circle meets—in person or virtually—to discuss applicants and determine grant recipients.

9) Notification & Awards

➤ Circle notifies all applicants of their status and awards grants to selected organizations.

10) Monitor

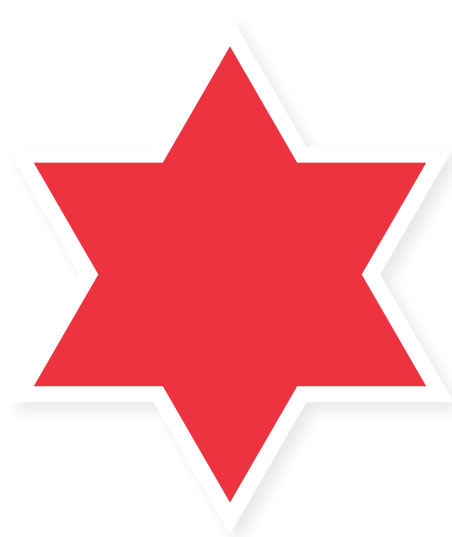
➤ In some circles, grantees report back to the circle on use of grant funds at specific intervals.

...JEWISH GIVING CIRCLE...

› Amplifier's mission is to strengthen and expand the field of Jewish giving circles, which to us means circles that are explicitly inspired by Jewish values, and/or that give to Jewish and/or Israeli organizations. We are particularly passionate about helping people—Jews and non-Jews—to frame their giving through the lens of Jewish values and experiences. Why?

› We believe that Jewish values around *tzedakah* (giving) are important and inspirational. No matter what you believe or what you practice—or even whether you are Jewish or not—Judaism, Jewish texts, and Jewish experiences offer profound ideas for shaping a meaningful life, with a strong emphasis on creating a more just and perfect world. No matter what causes you decide to support, Jewish values can inform and enrich your giving.

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› Social entrepreneurs and inspirational organizations in Jewish communities around the world need more support. Jewish giving circles are an excellent way to learn about and support causes and changemakers you've probably never heard of, doing work you've probably never imagined was happening in a Jewish context. If Jewish givers don't support this work, who will?

› Getting together to give is a great way to experience what being in a Jewish community *of your own making* is all about. Giving circles are an excellent way to create your own Jewish experiences, and to connect to ways of being Jewish that are meaningful to you and the other members of your circle. You are in the driver's seat: now go do something amazing!

How Can I Get Started?

The simple answer is: Gather a group of people and start talking! That's all it takes.

Amplifier offers a range of resources to make starting or joining a giving circle as simple as possible.



WEB PLATFORM

• **Giving Circle Directory** > Search giving circles by city, grant focus area, membership demographic. Join one or start your own.

• **Giving Circle Dashboard** > Your giving circle's home on the internet! Interact with your giving circle members through communications features like polls, events and messages. Edit your giving circle profile to spread the word about the great work you're doing.

• **Organization Directory** > Browse profiles of organizations from all over the world, including information about other Amplifier circles that are funding them. Find new organizations to support and put your own grant applicants on the map.

• **Common Grant Applications** > Brief common application that all giving circles registered on the Amplifier platform can access to learn more about grant applicants. Search the applications for the organizations that are right for your giving circle, or add a couple of customized questions of your own.

• Grant Opportunity Listings >

Search through open grant opportunities from giving circles, and apply through the application system.

RESOURCE LIBRARY

Over 85 resources available online, including:

• **Giving Circle Essentials** > A-Z of all things giving circle, from articulating your vision to keeping up with your grant recipients—and everything in between.

amplifiergiving.org/resources/giving-circle-essentials/

• **Building Blocks** > A step-by-step guide to the conversations a giving circle needs to have, from the very first “get to know you” to writing the grant checks.

amplifiergiving.org/resources/building-blocks/

POP-UP GIVING CIRCLE

Get a taste for the giving circle experience in 90 minutes using this all-inclusive workbook created by Amplifier and Slingshot. We're pretty sure you'll be hooked!

amplifiergiving.org/resources/express-workbook/

TRAINING & SUPPORT

Amplifier hosts an ongoing series of gatherings and in-person and web-based trainings.

• **Incubator** > Interested in starting a new giving circle? The Incubator trains you in every step of the process from recruitment and planning your first meeting through making and celebrating your grants.

• **Institute** > The Institute empowers giving circle leaders to strengthen and sustain their circles by deepening their impact in four key areas: ethical philanthropy, engaging in civil society, Jewish expression and community building. Circle leaders train with a top-notch faculty, and receive coaching to design new initiatives for their circles in their area of choice.

• **Coaching** > Amplifier's staff and growing network of coaches help support you as you launch and sustain your giving circle. Get connected to an expert in the field for one-to-one coaching, help getting unstuck and best practices from seasoned circle leaders.