

Building a Giving Circle

A Guide to Choosing Your Nonprofit Recipients

1 Ask your guests to come prepared. Encourage everyone to complete the values, issues, and mission statement worksheets in the Personal Philanthropy Plan guide. Sharing these personal giving priorities at the beginning of the discussion will help the group quickly identify common themes. **Download the guide at www.mycoloradoproject.org/plan.**

2 Set a time for arrival and a time for the discussion to begin. Allow your guests thirty minutes to gather refreshments and catch up socially. In the invitation, let guests know this expectation. *“Please arrive at 7pm—we will begin choosing our recipient nonprofits at 7:30pm.”*

3 Begin by setting the expectations and desired outcomes. Let your guests know that by the end of the discussion the goal is to select one to four recipient nonprofit organizations for the first year of your Giving Circle. Set some basic shared expectations such as:

- everyone gets a chance to share thoughts
- people should listen completely before responding
- discussion should be focused on reaching consensus on shared interests rather than expanding upon individual differences
- a timeline for each phase of the discussion so the group is focused on progressing through the steps of building a Giving Circle

4 Identify Shared Values and Interest. If appropriate for your group, have each participant share his or her top three values and issues and personal mission statement. Ask the group:

- Were there common themes that were echoed by multiple participants?
- What are the values we share?
- While respecting everyone’s individual priorities, what does this group have in common?
- Can we, as a group, create a mission statement for our Giving Circle?

If your group can identify shared values, issues, and create a mission statement, it will make selecting nonprofit recipients more focused and the Giving Circle’s goal meaningful.

5 Identify Your Nonprofit Recipients. Your group can choose 1-4 nonprofit recipients. If there is one nonprofit that sums up your Giving Circle’s purpose, it’s okay to select it as the sole recipient.

Community Shares’ member agencies fall into five service areas: Improving Health and Human Welfare, Working for a Just Society, Conserving Colorado’s Environment, Fostering Cultural Understanding and the Arts, and Promoting Animal Welfare. You can find more information about our members at www.mycoloradoproject.org or www.cshares.org.

6 Talk Specifics. In identifying your recipient nonprofit organizations, we encourage you to take a general issue and pinpoint your specific interests. Drill down deeper into the issue by asking more questions. For example, your Giving Circle may decide to focus on homelessness. Follow-up questions could include:

- Do you have a target population of particular concern such as teens, mothers with children, armed service veterans, the mentally ill, or those with chemical dependency?
- Are you interested in addressing the steps to get people into housing, the steps that lead people toward homelessness, affordable housing, or safe emergency shelter?
- Do you want to support comprehensive services, advocacy and addressing the root cause, or a specific area that resonates.

Contact Community Shares (mycolorado@cshares.org) for help finding a nonprofit that fits your interest or to request a facilitator—preferred 8+ participants and subject to availability.

7 Making the Decision. When it comes to the final decision, two effective selection models are taking a vote or reaching consensus. A **vote** would take place after every person was given the opportunity to fully make his or her case for support. An easy method is to select the number of nonprofit organizations you would like to support and have each participant vote on its preferred recipients. The nonprofit organizations receiving the most votes would be selected. You can also have participants weight their votes by giving four stars to their top choice, three stars for their second priority, etc. This would allow people to give extra weight to the cause they care about most.

A **consensus** means the conversation would continue until every member of the group agrees with the decision. Steps to Reaching Consensus:

- **Discussion:** Your discussion to this point has included identifying shared values, common issues, and identification of a host of potential recipient nonprofit organizations.
- **Proposal:** *"We've identified economic opportunity, job training, and homelessness as issues we all care about and we'd like to focus on Metro Denver. I propose we select DenverWorks, Center for Work Education and Employment, and Habitat for Humanity Metro Denver as our recipients."*
- **Call for Consensus:** The facilitator asks the group if anyone would like to express concerns about the proposal. Silence is considered agreement.
- **Addressing Concerns:** If a participant expresses a concern, the group will typically re-open the discussion, attempt to address the concern and clarify the areas of agreement.
- **Modify the Proposal:** The proposal is modified based upon the discussion and clarification and presented to the group. The steps of calling for consensus, addressing concerns, and modifying the proposal are repeated until consensus is met.

End with an "ask". It is important to end by clearly asking people to make a financial contribution to the Giving Circle. *"Our next step is to put our money where our hearts are. Tonight I'm committing to making a donation of \$25 each month to our Giving Circle. Every dollar makes a difference and you can each give as little as \$5 a month. Will anyone else make a commitment tonight to a gift?"*

Create Your Giving Circle. Go online and create your giving circle based on the results of the discussion. You can finish your giving circle in seven steps:

- 1. Name:** Choose a name for the Giving Circle—a great way to end the party!
Message from the Fund Manager: Include a note of thanks to everyone for participating.
- 2. Description:** Write a brief description of how the people in the circle are connected and the purpose of the Giving Circle.
- 3. Cause Channel:** If your Giving Circle aligns with a specific issue area choose it. Otherwise, select *Investing in the Colorado Community*.
- 4. Giving Goal:** Your goal can be related to financial contributions, participants, or you can use this as a place to share your mission statement.
- 5. Logo:** Someone in your group may want to put a creative visual stamp on your circle.
- 6. Sponsored Nonprofits:** Using the drop-down lists, fill in the 1-4 nonprofits you selected.

Other Ideas:

- If you have a fun-loving group, have an annual tournament (volleyball, kickball, ping pong) with each team playing for a nonprofit. The top teams select the Giving Circle recipients for the year.
- Think outside the box—many people want to give but no one asks them to participate. Maybe your fantasy football league, alumni group, book club, mommy and me group, fans of your rock band, or supporters of your small business will want to join together to give back.
- For small groups, you could meet at a coffee shop or pub to make your selections—don't get hung up on hosting if you don't need to for your Giving Circle.
- You can also do a one-time drive for a time-sensitive cause (crisis funding), in lieu of gifts for a special occasion (birthday party, wedding, etc.), or in conjunction with a volunteer day.