

More Troubling Fundraising News in Latest Giving USA Report

07.12.24 | Linda J. Rosenthal, JD



In 2023, fundraising from individual donors was not easy, either at home or abroad. If it isn't one thing – raging inflation, for instance – it's another.

Even the ancient Roman Baths in Southwestern England is not immune from difficulties these days snagging donations. See Roman Baths lose thousands after going contactless (July 10, 2024) Emma Elgee & Simon Parkin, *BBC News*. The World Heritage Site is a popular tourist destination in the city named after these early “thermae.” The destination has “... lost more than £90,000 in donations since telling visitors not to throw coins in a 2,000-year-old cold plunge pool and to donate through contactless payments instead.”

Sightseers had long used the famous Circular Bath as an unofficial wishing well. But “hundreds of thousands of coins were ‘damaging and corroding’ the special site,” according to Kevin Guy, leader of Bath and North East Somerset Council. Conservation experts “.. made the decision in March 2022 to ... ask people to donate using a card.”

It hasn't gone well, but Mr. Guy says that local officials are determined to continue with the new technology. The Roman Baths are “... slightly older than the Trevi fountain in Rome and it's been there for 2,000 years and the primary concern of the council is to make sure it is still there in another 2,000 years time for future tourists to enjoy.”

Giving USA Report 2023

The nonprofit sector has always carefully followed news and data about charitable giving trends and patterns.

For over 65 years, U.S. funders and donors have relied on “Giving USA: The Annual Report on Philanthropy in America,” considered the gold standard for this type of publication comprising the “annual estimate of contributions from foundations, individuals, and corporations.”

On June 25, 2024, the [Giving USA Foundation](#), a public service initiative of The Giving Institute, announced completion of “Giving USA 2024: The Annual Report on Philanthropy for 2023” by the distinguished scholars from the prestigious [Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy at IU Indianapolis](#). The full, 350+-page report will be available by mid-July via subscription at the Foundation’s website.

In the meantime, the Lilly authors have released a helpful summary of the key points at [Giving USA: U.S. charitable giving totaled \\$557.16 billion in 2023](#) (June 25, 2024) [philanthropy.indianapolis.iu.edu](#). This overview explains how the most recent year’s activity compares or contrasts with trends over the past several years

We’ve discussed these reports since 2019 – well before a catastrophic worldwide pandemic was on anyone’s radar. A growing concern back then was data suggesting a trend of a declining rate of *individual* giving. This pattern was stemmed temporarily during the height of the pandemic, but it is again a worry for philanthropy.

For background and context relevant to the 2023 Report, including links to earlier reports, see:

- [Giving USA Report Has Troubling News](#) (July 16, 2019), *FPLG Blog* [Re: 2018]
- [Giving USA Report on 2020 Philanthropy](#) (October 12, 2021) *FPLG Blog* [Re: 2020]
- [New Giving USA Report Is Out](#) (June 23, 2022), *FPLG Blog* [Re: 2021]
- [New Surveys: Alarm Bells for Nonprofit Sector](#) (June 26, 2023) *FPLG Blog* [Re: 2022]

Key 2023 Findings

“Individuals, bequests, foundations and corporations gave an estimated \$557.16 billion to U.S. charities in 2023.” That’s an impressive sum: “Total giving grew 1.9% in current dollars, reaching a new high by that measure.”

“Nevertheless, growth in total giving did not outpace the higher-than-average (4.1%) inflation rate.” When “adjusted for inflation, giving declined by 2.1%.”

“The increase in current dollars was buoyed by the stock market and GDP – both performed better than many economists initially expected in 2023.” However, “total giving has not yet surpassed the all-time inflation-adjusted high set in 2021.”

The Lilly faculty authors add: “Total giving remains above pre-pandemic levels, even when adjusted for inflation....”

Josh Birkholz, Chair of the Giving USA Foundation, saw good news in the fact that Americans “increased their giving over the previous year despite the elevated cost of living and headlines warning of a possible recession in 2023 We’re not yet back to the highs of pandemic-era giving, but there are some signs of stability.”

Amir Pasic, Ph.D., the Eugene R. Tempel Dean of the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, made this observation: “Nonprofits have had to navigate many unpredictable developments in the last few years including a rare decline in total giving in 2022 and changes brought on by the pandemic. While the philanthropic landscape continues to evolve, it’s encouraging to see that giving continues to be resilient.”

Additional Initial Commentary

“Giving USA released its annual report on the state of charitable giving in late June, and its findings, while a welcome improvement over last year’s topline that 2022 giving declined by 10.5% after inflation, are still somewhat mixed. See Charitable donations continue to decline, down 2.1% in 2023, according to a new Giving USA report (June 25, 2024), Rasheeda Childress, *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*.

“Bottom line? We should use the publication of Giving USA’s insightful and expansive study to appreciate the astonishing breadth of American philanthropy, celebrate the fact that giving is above pre-pandemic levels and question whether fundraisers can reverse ominous trends like the decline in individual giving.” See Giving USA Annual Report: With Real Giving Down in 2023, the Onus Is on Donors (July 8, 2024) Mike Scutari, *insidephilanthropy.com*.

Conclusion

“After a tumultuous 2022, total giving’s growth in 2023 may indicate positive signs in the nonprofit sector.”

– Linda Rosenthal, J.D., FPLG Information & Research Director