

Inside **Philanthropy**

New Study Finds Meager Giving to Women and Girls' Groups

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It's hard to sort out and isolate philanthropic giving to women and girls. A new index and report from the Women's Philanthropy Institute (WPI) aim to quantify donations from individuals, foundations and corporations to 45,000 organizations in the U.S. identified as "dedicated to women and girls." While women's and girls' rights and causes are receiving more political and cultural attention, the [report](#) shows this shift is not translating into significant philanthropic support.

Using tax forms, WPI carried out a financial analysis of these women's and girls' groups, finding they received a collective total of \$6.3 billion in 2016. When the researchers compared this number to a *Giving USA* figure that charities in the U.S. received \$396.5 billion overall in 2016, they determined women's and girls' groups received about 1.6 percent of donations that year.

Why is this funding percentage so low?

“What we see in philanthropy today reflects the systemic oppression we have experienced throughout our history. We live in a society that was not created for women and girls, particularly those of color, and it is our job to point out this inequality within our own sector,” says Ms. Foundation for Women President and CEO Teresa Younger. She adds that while her foundation believes “philanthropic spaces should be guided by those most impacted by the work, resourcing these organizations cannot fall solely on women.”

WPI notes the new Women and Girls Index (WGI) and accompanying report, based on data from 2016, precede the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements. It states future studies “are necessary to determine how philanthropic support for women’s and girls’ organizations changed following these events.”

Many groups fund women and girls without stating so in their core mission, and women’s and girls’ causes, activities and needs span the nonprofit sector. This makes measuring related philanthropy a challenge, and WGI’s new data can be useful for funders, nonprofits and researchers. The report shares many insights, like which causes women’s and girls’ groups focus on and which are most funded. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which launched a major [gender strategy](#) in 2018, funded this research, as it has past WPI studies.

(Yesterday, Melinda Gates called out meager giving for girls and women in announcing a [new pledge of \\$1 billion](#) from her company to promote gender equality; it’s not clear how much of this money will take the form of philanthropic contributions.)

Health and Human Services Take the Biggest Slice of the Pie

In order to be included in the Women and Girls Index, a group must meet one of two criteria: It must be “dedicated to serving primarily women and girls,” like Planned Parenthood or Girls Inc.; or be “a collective of women

and girls that serves general philanthropic purposes,” such as a Junior League or women’s auxiliary. Through a series of data-mining investigations of more than 1 million tax forms and other resources based on keywords, phrases and “rule” conditions, and hand-checking of some results, WPI created a 45,000-organization index. It found organizations dedicated to women and girls make up 3.3 percent of U.S. nonprofits, and they exist within every nonprofit subsector.

When the WGI groups are sorted by mission focus, organizations that focus on general women’s health received the greatest support in 2016, at \$1.2 billion. Organizations with missions dedicated to reproductive health and family planning, and those addressing family and gender-based violence received the second- and third-highest levels of funding, respectively.

If the groups are ranked by nonprofit subsector, human services and then women’s health were most funded, at \$2.1 billion and \$1.6 billion, respectively. The largest portion (36 percent) of WGI groups work in the human services subsector. The second- and third-largest subsectors for WGI organizations are those in the mutual, public, and societal benefit subsector (such as the Ms. Foundation); and the arts, culture and humanities subsector. Health comes in fourth, followed by education and several others.

On average, WPI found the organizations dedicated to women and girls are much smaller than other nonprofits, in terms of both financial and human resources. The report states women’s and girls’ groups “appear to be doing more with less.”

Another key finding was that women’s and girls’ organizations received about 3.1 percent of all donor-advised fund dollars granted between 2012 and 2015. “Examining why DAF grants disproportionately support WGI organizations compared to overall charitable giving to these nonprofits would [be] a useful direction for future research,” the authors state.

A Difficult Funding Area to Measure

“Partially due to the absence of a technical definition of giving to women and girls, [like] a formal subsector classification, this area of philanthropy has not been rigorously studied,” Tessa Skidmore, a WPI visiting research associate and writer of the report, tells us. She says it has been hard to compare women’s and girls’ groups to other nonprofits or track their funding.

A 2009 [report](#) by Candid (formerly the Foundation Center) and the Women’s Funding Network studied women’s foundations and funds, and also a sample of broader foundation funding for women and girls. It states, “since 1990, the share of grant dollars targeted to benefit women and girls has ranged from 5 percent in 1990 to 7.4 percent in 2000 and 2003.”

Given the difficulty of this kind of research, the recent WPI analysis and report was not all-inclusive, nor was its statistic that women’s and girls’ groups received 1.6 percent of all donations in 2016. For example, the WPI analysis did not include financial data on religious congregations or organizations, or on private foundations. Skidmore says this is because of the differences in these groups’ tax filing requirements. She says some non-filing groups, “mostly religious organizations,” dedicated to women and girls are still named in the WGI, but their financial information “was not included in the analyses.” To calculate that women’s and girls’ groups received 1.6 percent of all donations in 2016, WPI compared total donations to its WGI groups to a *Giving USA* estimate for all donations in that year. The *Giving USA* estimate does include donations to religious organizations and private foundations, while the WGI data does not.

Also, many groups, like CARE and the United States Fund for UNICEF, focus some of their programming on women and girls, but do not primarily serve this population. This is an especially tricky area of philanthropy to pin down. While they are not included in the WGI, the report authors state they used a sample of these groups to develop a separate “very conservative

estimate of spending on women's and girls' causes" by such organizations, which was \$1.6 billion.

Previous WPI [research](#) found 63 percent of women's foundations and funds are part of bigger organizations, meaning many of them would not be in the new index. Skidmore confirms, saying, "Women's foundations and funds that are part of larger organizations that are not dedicated to women and girls would not be included." But she says some of the parent organizations would be included in WPI's sample and conservative estimate of groups that do not primarily serve women and girls.

Research Applications and Future Questions

The WPI team points out a variety of useful applications for the WGI. "Fundraisers and nonprofits can use the findings to benchmark their organizations against others in the index," a press release states. Scholars can use the index for future study, and ideally, it can help everyone in philanthropy to apply a more informed gender lens to their work. The WGI and report certainly highlight a lack of targeted funding for women and girls and broaden the field of useful data in this realm.

Along with the notable DAF giving stat, the authors identify several other inquiry topics raised by their work. These include characteristics and comparisons of older and newer organizations dedicated to women and girls; geographic patterns of group distribution, funding and characteristics; and other topics.

It seems follow-up research could also explore demographics such as race, age, LGBTQ+ identity or disability status, among others, in relation to these nonprofit organizations, their funders and the communities served.

WPI will continue to update the WGI regularly.