

A Tapestry of Giving

Philanthropy in the
Arab American Community



CENTER FOR ARAB
AMERICAN PHILANTHROPY

Give Smart. Give Together.

A Tapestry of Giving:

Philanthropy in the Arab American Community

Over the past two decades, the philanthropic community has committed resources and facilitated shared learning to strengthen giving in communities of color. While research has been conducted on giving in African American, Latinx, Asian American and Indigenous communities, no extensive research has been conducted on giving in the Arab American community. The most recent research report on Arab American giving is *Insights on Arab American Giving*, published in 2006 by the Center for Arab American Philanthropy. Conducting research on Arab Americans is challenging due to the country-wide lack of demographic data on Middle Eastern and North African groups. Arab Americans are invisible in the census, resulting in a dearth of information on Arab Americans in general.

Yet, Arab American giving has a long and proud history in this country, including to religious institutions, cultural associations, education initiatives, local communities and much more. Today, Arab American philanthropists are giving back in all areas of American society while continuing to support communities in need across the world. As Arab Americans reclaim their own narrative about their contributions and impact in this country, no story is complete without uplifting the ways that Arab American philanthropy contributes to improving communities, our country, and the world.

The Center for Arab American Philanthropy (CAAP), the only Arab American community foundation in the country, is a leader and advocate for telling the story of Arab American giving to the broader philanthropic community. While not representative of all Arab American philanthropy, *A Tapestry of Giving* provides a snapshot of giving attitudes, habits, motivations and priorities for those who participated in the study. Our hope is that *A Tapestry of Giving* will lead to richer conversations about the impact and role of Arab American giving in shaping our society.

Methodology

The CAAP research team utilized two primary methods for gathering data from the community: a community-wide survey and focus groups. The survey was distributed from November 2021 to January 2022 through CAAP and ACCESS email listservs, social media, CAAP's leadership and advisory board, and Arab American nonprofit organizations. Some survey questions have been adapted from the Blackbaud Institute's *Diversity in Giving* February 2015 report. 300 partial and completed responses were submitted. In addition to the survey, CAAP hosted 4 focus groups with a total of 18 participants from across the country. Each focus group was 90 minutes and reflected diversity in age, geography and experience with CAAP.

We recognize that the findings in this survey are only from a limited number of Arab Americans who are not necessarily representative of the broader Arab American community. For that reason, this report does not intend to be definitive on all aspects of Arab American giving. Rather, *A Tapestry of Giving* offers themes of some prominent patterns in Arab American giving, as reflected by the findings.

Executive Summary

Arab American giving at a glance

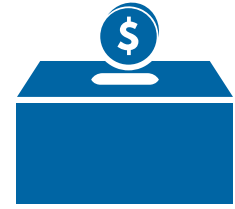
Arab American givers, whether or not they identify as philanthropists, are making an impact from local to international communities. Findings from research on giving in the Arab American community have surfaced nine themes.



Arab Americans connect with their Arab American identity when giving



Arab American giving is deeply personal



Arab American giving is driven by gratitude and responsibility



Philanthropy is learned over time



Trust in an organization continues to be important for Arab Americans



Arab Americans care about the impact of their giving



Arab Americans are generous with their time



Arab Americans give significantly in their local communities and in the United States



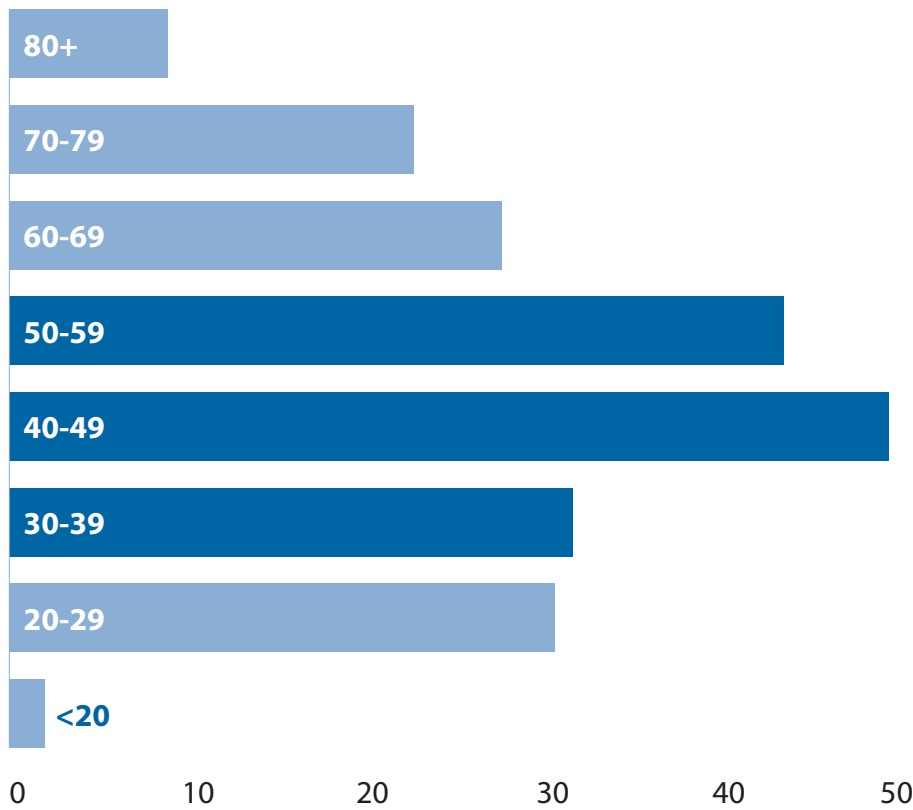
Arab Americans see power in collective giving

More information regarding each theme can be found in the following pages, as well as an overview of focus group participants and survey respondents and where and how Arab Americans give.

Who completed the survey?

The survey was widely distributed through CAAP and ACCESS email and social media, with a total of 300 survey responses. All survey respondents self-identified as Arab American. The information below is based on responses to each question, not on the total number of responses.

The majority of respondents are between the ages of **30 and 59**.



Respondents identified their ancestry from **12 Arab countries**, with the highest percentages being Palestine (33.6%), Lebanon (32.2%) and Syria (10.9%).

Over **60% of respondents identified as Muslim** and 21.5% as Christian. Just over 9% preferred not to answer the question, and 8.2% indicated that they had no religion.

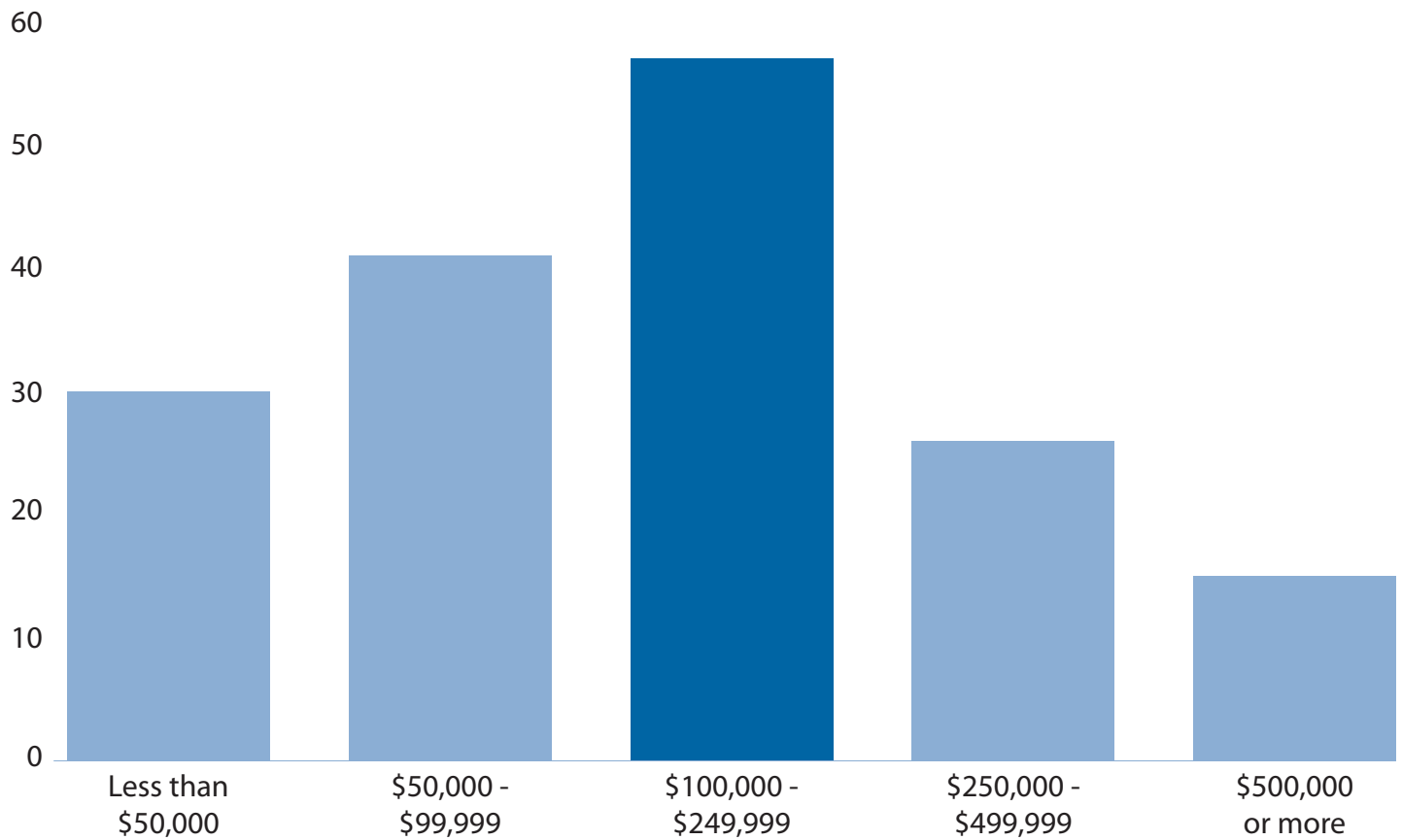
300
Survey Responses

56%
of respondents are female.

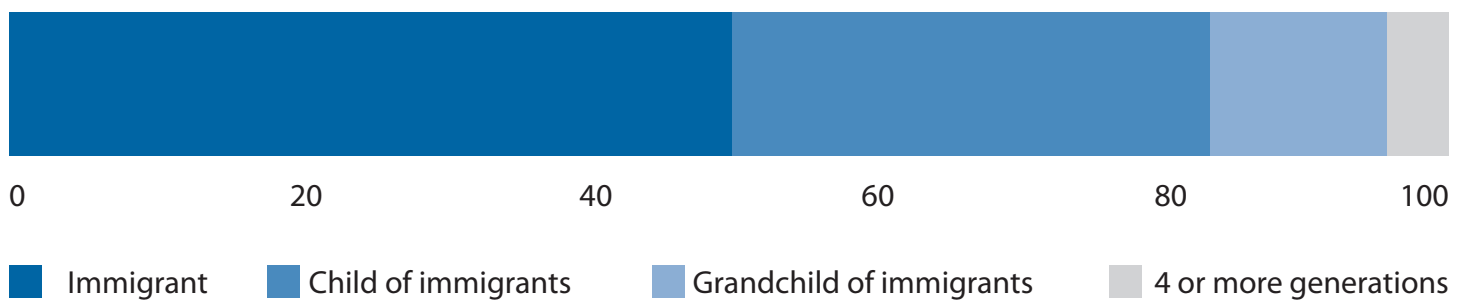


Who completed the survey? (contd.)

The majority of respondents have an annual household income between **\$100,000 and \$249,999**.

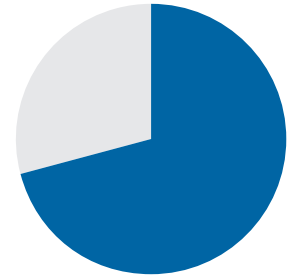


Over **80%** of respondents were either an immigrant or a child of immigrants.



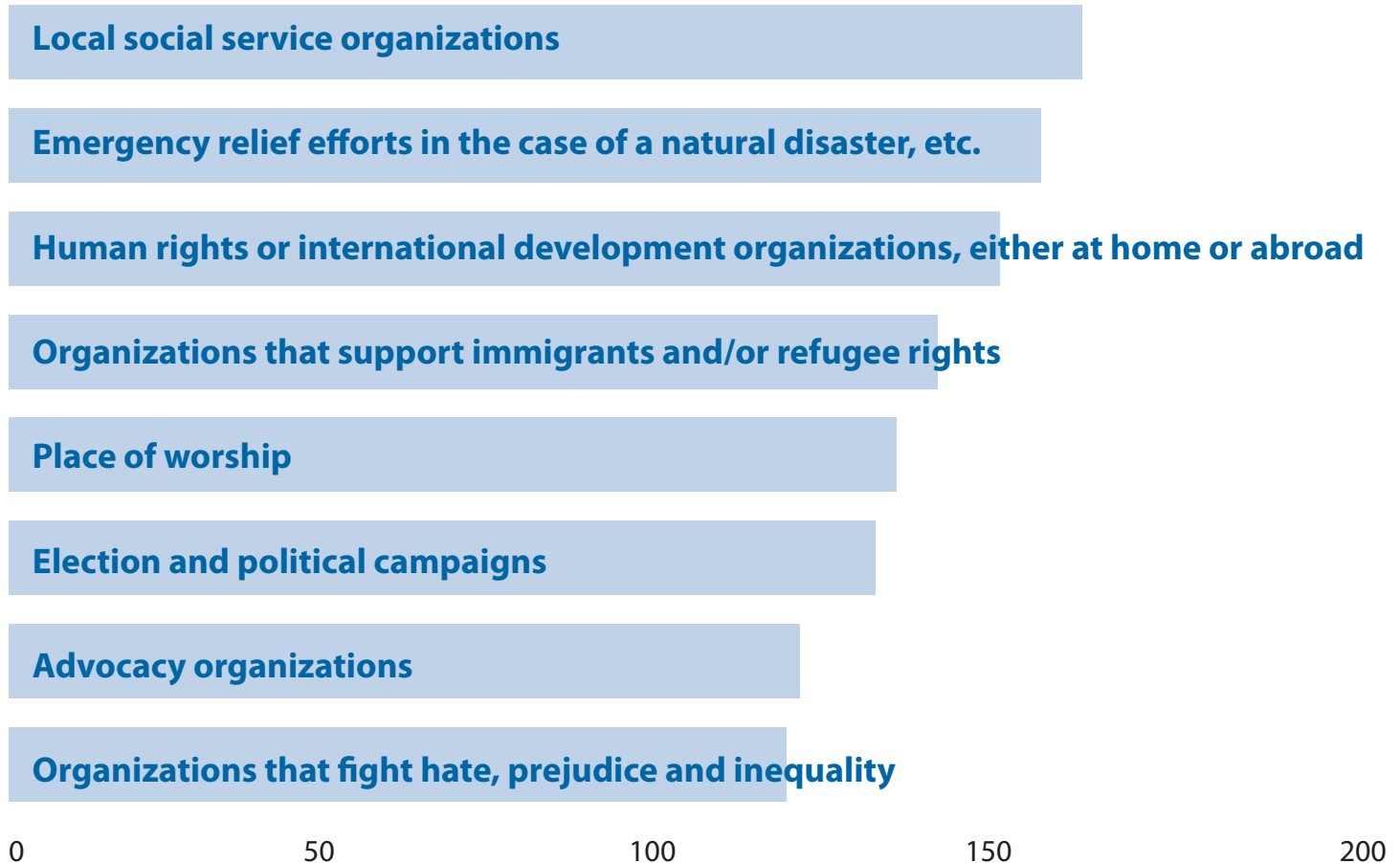
What do Arab Americans care about?

The causes and organizations that Arab Americans support are as varied as the Arab American community itself. Respondents supported all of the 23 categories of organizations and causes listed in the survey in some way. These causes include organizations that support direct services, places of worship, political and advocacy efforts, health organizations, arts organizations, education and youth development, environment, animal rights, and organizations that help the elderly, among others. While the survey indicated a preference for giving to direct service organizations, focus group respondents most frequently discussed giving to support international relief and development, health organizations (with an emphasis on the health of children), and education (particularly scholarships and universities).



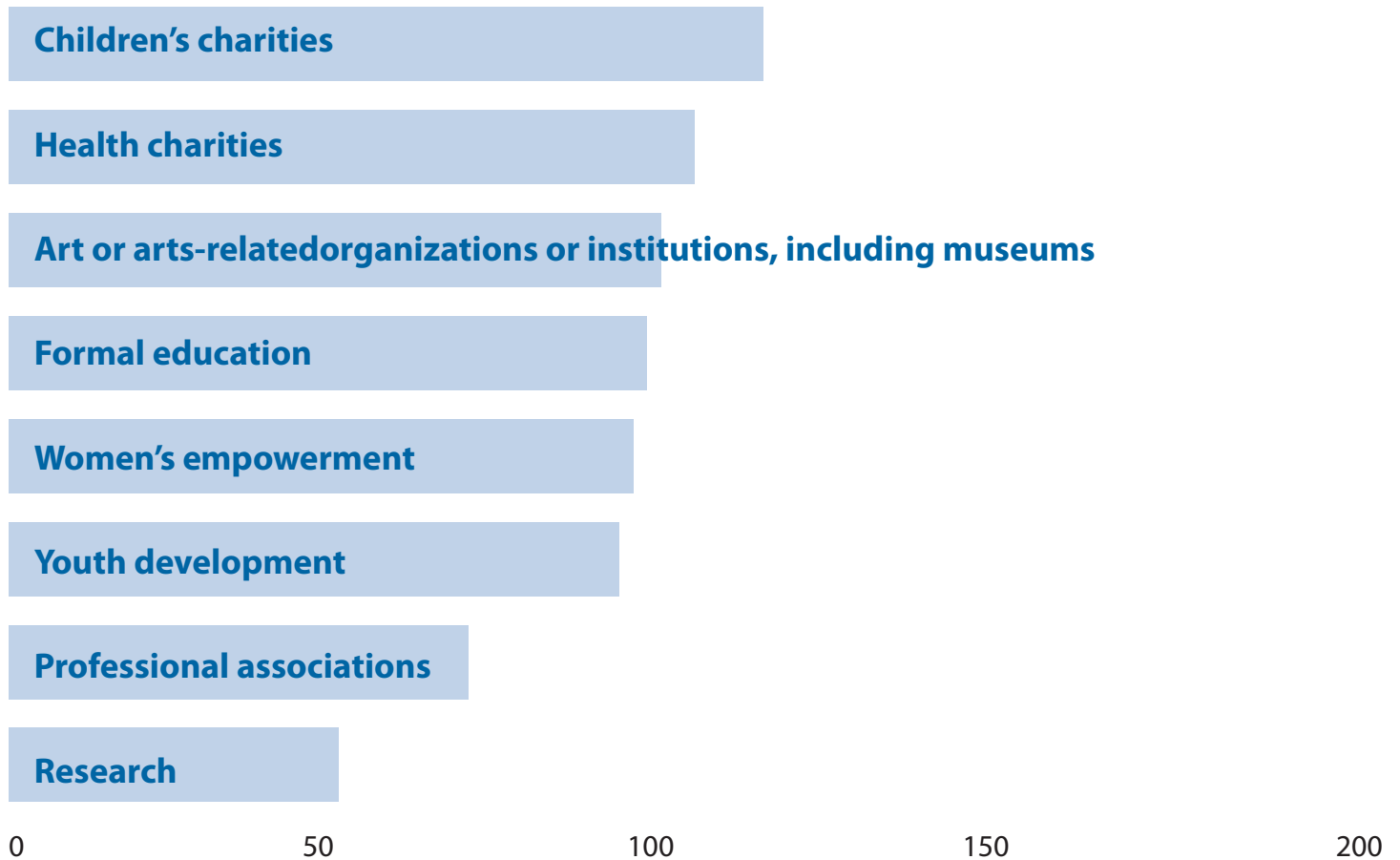
Over 70% of respondents reported giving to local social service organizations and/or emergency relief efforts in the past three years.

Over the past 3 years, I gave to the following types of organizations:



What do Arab Americans care about? (contd.)

Over the past 3 years, I gave to the following types of organizations (contd.):



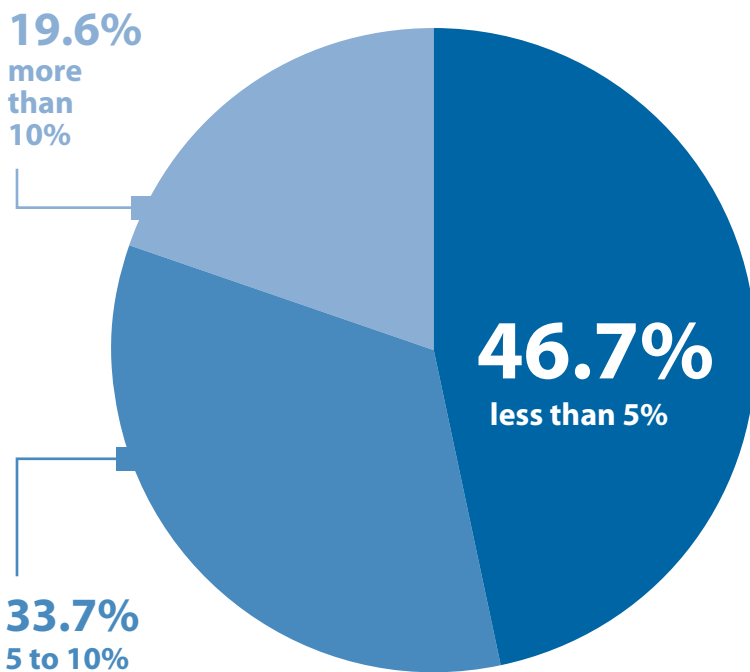
Priorities varied across survey respondents by both age and income. According to the survey, respondents under 40 are more likely to prioritize organizations that support immigrant and refugee rights, while respondents over 60 are more likely to prioritize advocacy organizations and election and political campaigns.

People with higher incomes are also more likely to prioritize election and political campaigns. 66.67% of respondents making \$500k or more said they prioritize giving to election and political campaigns compared to 20% of those making between \$20k and \$49k. The trend also exists among people in higher income brackets prioritizing giving to formal education and professional associations.

How much do Arab Americans give?

How much of their income Arab Americans give is a particularly challenging question to answer— one which this report is not prepared to address. Questions around finances and giving are often extremely sensitive and involve information individuals would rather keep private. However, a few trends can be identified from the survey responses.

Over the past three years I donated about ___% of my income



Almost half of the survey respondents give less than 5% of their income. Individuals in higher income brackets are more likely to give a higher percentage of their income. Older individuals also indicated that they gave more of their income than younger individuals. Specifically, more than 50% of individuals over the age of 70 indicated that they donated more than 10% of their income.

How do Arab Americans give?

As with other communities, Arab Americans utilize diverse mechanisms for giving, including donor advised funds, family foundations, crowdfunding platforms, payroll deduction and company matching programs, and community foundations (including CAAP). Younger generations are more likely to use online giving mechanisms such as social media or crowdfunding platforms, while older generations are more likely to donate through an email appeal and donate appreciated stocks.

The survey revealed that fundraising events are central to Arab American giving. 63% of respondents indicated that they purchased a ticket for a fundraising event to support an organization. Focus group participants also discussed attending fundraising events, but preferred to purchase a ticket as their support, rather than contribute onsite at the event.

20.2% of all respondents gave through a family foundation

Fundraising events are central to Arab American giving. 63% of respondents indicated that they purchased a ticket for a fundraising event to support an organization.

Themes of giving in the Arab American community

Through the focus group and survey, nine key themes emerged around giving in the Arab American community. These themes are based on the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of those who participated in the research and may not reflect the broader Arab American community. However, little agreement existed among focus groups participants on their identity as a philanthropist. In general, younger Arab Americans whose families had been in the U.S. for multiple generations were more likely to identify as a philanthropist. Those who did not identify as philanthropists felt that defining themselves as a philanthropist required some level of giving that they had not yet achieved. Those who identified as philanthropists saw their giving, no matter the amount, as a form of philanthropy.

Younger Arab Americans are more likely to claim the term philanthropist than older Arab Americans.

"I don't think I give enough money to earn that term philanthropist. I don't give enough talent or treasure or time, all three, to be a philanthropist."

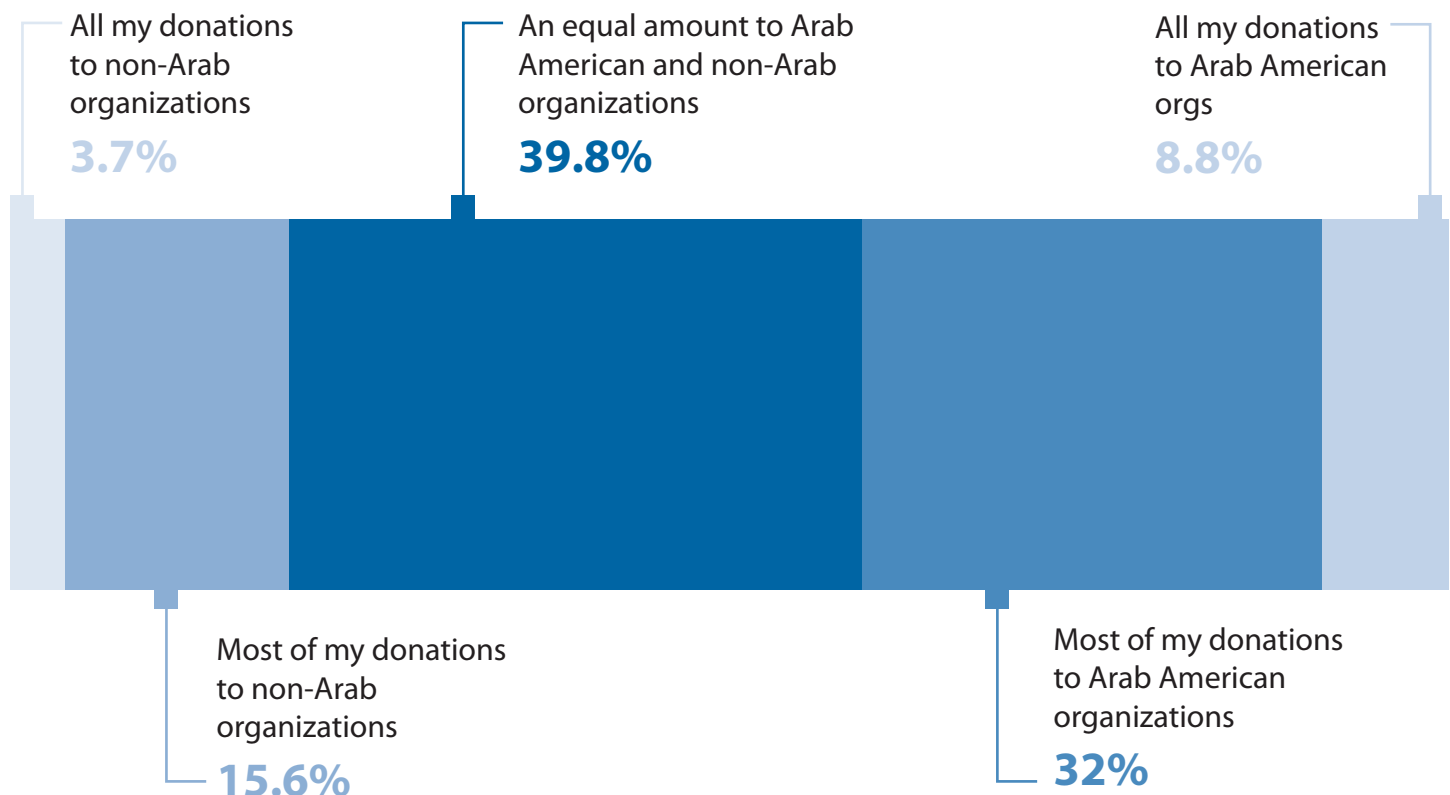
"I learned that philanthropy doesn't matter what the amount is, you can start with what you can afford and you're better to start from anywhere than do nothing."

Arab Americans connect deeply with their identity when giving

When asked about what motivates their giving, what types of organizations they give to, or how their identity impacts their giving choices, participants reflected on how their own identity has shaped their approach. Arab American identities are not homogenous, thus participants' giving reflected their personal identity as an Arab American in unique and individual ways. Many participants give both to causes that strengthen the Arab American community here and to those that support needs in their ancestral countries. Participants also see philanthropy as a powerful way for Arab Americans to tell their own story about their contributions to American society and to leave a legacy for future generations. Identity also powerfully motivates participants' giving to non-Arab organizations as a way for non-Arabs to better understand the Arab American community. Finally, many participants talked about leaving a legacy for future generations of Arab Americans to be proud of and build upon.

"I choose organizations that reflect my ethnicity to show that immigrants have a positive impact on the nation."

Over the past 3 years I gave...



Arab Americans connect deeply with their identity when giving (contd.)

Christians and Muslims are more likely to prioritize giving to Arab American organizations than respondents who identified as having no religion. In addition, respondents whose families have been in the United States for four or more generations are less likely to agree that it was their responsibility to support the Arab American community.

“Philanthropy is a way forward for us as an Arab American community.”

Almost **85%** of respondents strongly agree or agree with the statement:

I feel it is my responsibility to support organizations which positively impact people in the Arab American community

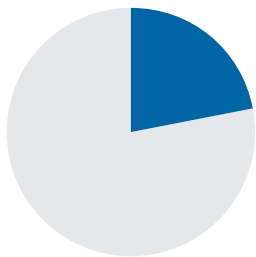
Arab American giving is deeply personal

During the focus groups, participants spent a significant amount of time discussing the ways their personal histories drive their giving priorities. This was reflected in their support of education, health, and refugee-serving organizations in Arab American and international organizations.

Personal connections play a critical role in how Arab Americans give. Family and friends often influence giving, as participants seek input and recommendations from those they trust. Participants are more likely to give to organizations they are unfamiliar with if asked by a peer.

Finally, participants are committed to sharing the value of philanthropy with the next generation, using their relationships with children and future generations to pass on a legacy of giving. Many participants mentioned engaging younger generations in giving back in small ways, including volunteerism and fundraising events.

Arab Americans are least likely to give through impersonal means:



22% made a donation to someone who came up to them on the street or to their door



19% responded to a phone call



5.2% responded to a television program or ad



5.2% responded to a radio program or ad

"In terms of what I donate to, and why, it is very much on a personal level."

"If it's an organization I don't know much about, I might reach out to those I trust to ask, 'What do you know about this organization?'"



53% of survey respondents are more likely to support an organization if their friends ask than the organization

"It's very important for me to be a role model for my kids. If they can see me do something, they will follow."

Arab American giving is driven by gratitude and obligation

The majority of focus group participants shared that their giving was led at least in part by a devotion to their faith obligations. Religious leaders and communities inspire commitments to giving by making compassion a core focus in conversations. Younger survey respondents are more likely to agree that they feel a responsibility to support organizations on account of their faith. The survey also showed that Arab Americans prioritize giving to their place of worship.

"I always believe this is my duty because our faith tells us that whatever money we earn is not all ours."

Muslim respondents are more likely than Christian respondents to agree that they feel a responsibility to support organizations due to their faith.

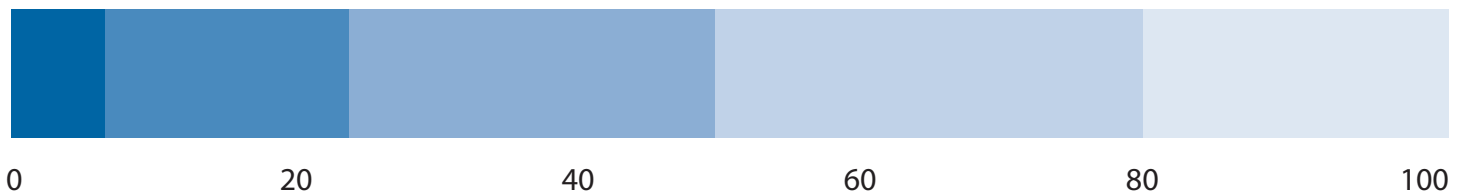
Muslim

(Total responses: 127)



Christian

(Total responses: 47)



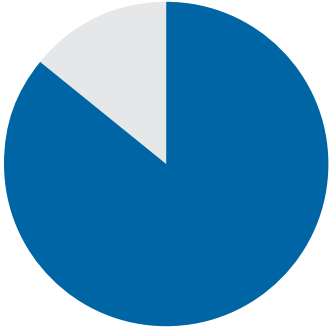
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Arab American giving is driven by gratitude and obligation (contd.)

This typically overlaps with donors feeling a general sense of duty to extend their privileges to others. Nearly all focus group participants noted immense gratitude for the lives they're living, which increases empathy and a responsibility to share with those who haven't had the same opportunities. This was especially true for individuals with close ties to their ancestry, such as those who have immigrated themselves or whose parents or grandparents made sacrifices for future generations. Participants were particularly moved to give by tragedies in places such as Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, and Palestine.

Participants also frequently mentioned supporting education and scholarships as a key area of importance for giving, as education was the primary factor that led many participants to the outcomes they have today. Overall, it was clear that donors believe an inherent purpose of their own lives is to give back to others.

"I've had a really lucky life in a lot of ways. I don't live in poverty, I don't live in a refugee camp. I'm tremendously thankful for that, and to have education and health care."



86% of survey respondents agree with the statement:

"It is my responsibility to support organizations through monetary donations."

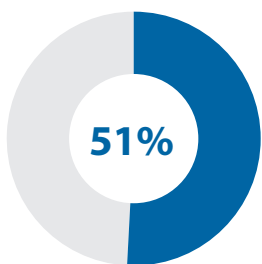
Philanthropy is learned over time

When discussing their philanthropy, many participants reflected on how they learned about philanthropy and how their own giving has changed over time. When reflecting on what first inspired people to give, participants in focus groups discussed the role of their parents or a mentor in teaching them about philanthropy and giving back. Many participants had someone to look up to in leading them to do the same. Philanthropy and the notion of giving back is something they learned over time and continue to learn more about as their own giving grows.

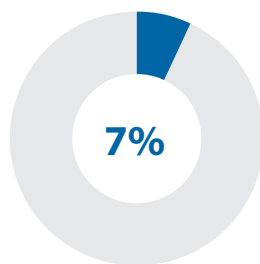
Participants also noted that as they learn more about philanthropy, their giving changes. Focus group participants discussed that their giving has shifted to being more strategic and going beyond monetary contributions to give back in ways that they feel can provide the most value based on their skillsets. The survey data on trends by age reflects the same shift in giving that was discussed in the focus groups.

I would like to support more organizations but don't know how.

Under 40

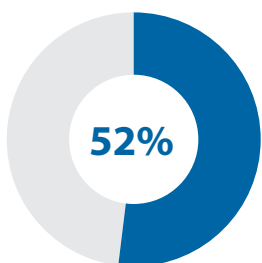


70 and over

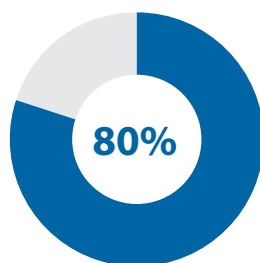


I know what organizations I will give to each year.

Under 40



70 and over



"It's a learned skill. You know people need help and that you can actually make a difference."

Younger respondents were more likely to agree with statements that suggest their giving is driven more by emotion.

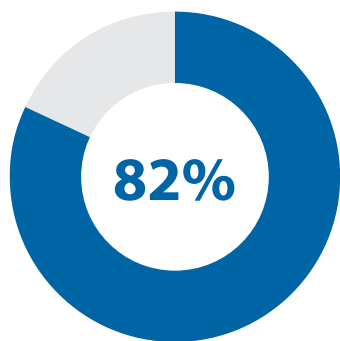
"I'm following in my father's footsteps. He's been my inspiration in that regard, and it feels good at the end of the day."

Trust in organizations continues to be important for Arab Americans

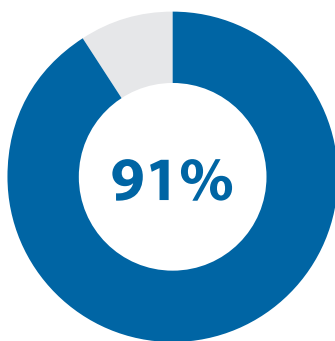
In CAAP's first research conducted on Arab American giving in 2006, participants discussed challenges in giving in the post 9/11 era, particularly their concerns about their giving being targeted or investigated under the Patriot Act. Trust in the organization was of paramount importance to participants. 16 years later, trust in the organizations that individuals support continues to matter to Arab American donors. Personal relationships, either the leadership of the organization or the recommendation of a friend or family member, are key to that trust. Participants take time to review the management of an organization and ask critical questions about the organization's impact and value. While participants indicated that Arab Americans were more comfortable giving to Arab organizations now than in years past, there was still some hesitancy in giving to Arab and Palestinian organizations for fear of political or professional repercussions.

"If there's an organization I trust, if I know the leader of that organization, then I'm loyal to them until that person loses that trust."

Reputation and leadership are important:



I consider the leadership of the organization when making decisions about giving



I consider an organization's reputation and/or review their charity rating before giving

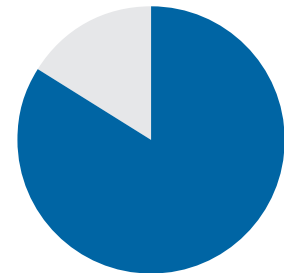
"Who runs the organization and their track record is a big factor for me. We look at the structure, who is doing the work"

Individuals with higher income and age are more likely to consider the leadership of an organization than those with lower income and age

Arab Americans care about the impact of their giving

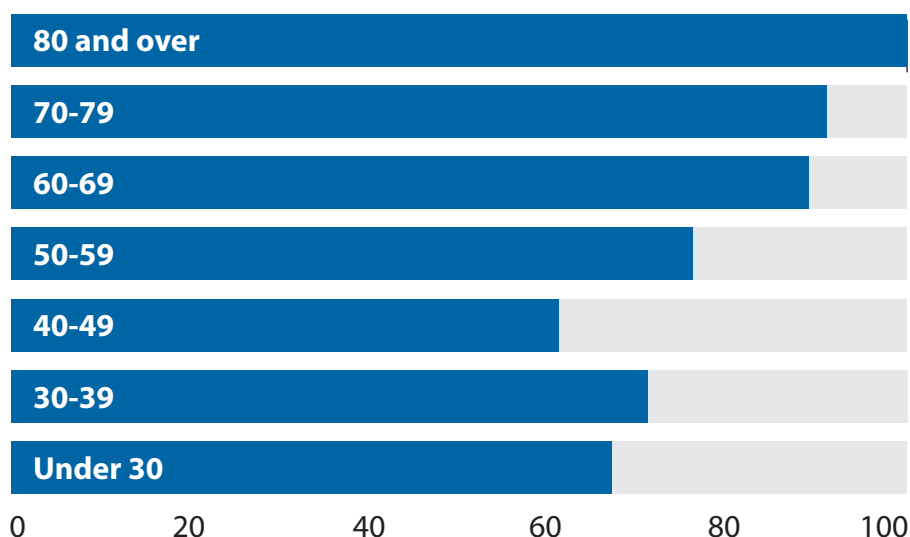
The importance of giving both time and money came across in the surveys and was discussed across focus groups. Respondents want to see the impact of their giving both in direct observation as well as in metrics and reporting from organizations. Focus group participants discussed the importance of knowing their contributions will make a difference and wanting to ensure dollars were being used effectively. An organization's impact plays a significant role when deciding where to donate.

Focus group participants also discussed the importance of donations being put directly toward the impact of the organization rather than overhead. Though many brought up understanding the need for spending on programming and the inevitability of overhead costs, they are cognizant of the proportion of dollars being spent on overhead costs and factor that in when making decisions. This came across in the surveys as well in questions related to concern over overhead costs.



84% of respondents prefer to give to organizations that make a difference by providing direct services.

Older respondents are more concerned than younger respondents about what percentage of their giving goes to overhead versus programming.



"I would love a world where you can see the impact of what you're doing and using that as a means to decide where you put more of your time. My general belief would be, that wherever I can make the greatest impact is where I will donate my time."

Immigrants and children of immigrants prefer to give to organizations that make a difference by providing direct services more so than individuals whose families have been here for generations.

Arab Americans are generous with their time

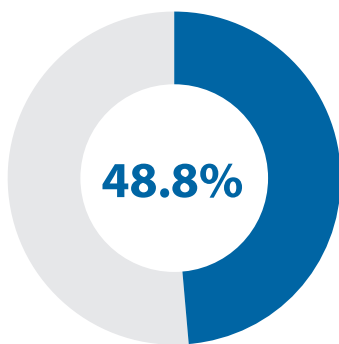
Participants recognize that giving is a spectrum that goes beyond financial contributions. Two-thirds of respondents gave their time in addition to monetary donations, and 28% of those surveyed identified volunteerism as the way of giving that makes the biggest difference. This includes a wide range of actions, whether that be engaging in advocacy work, volunteering to provide resources like food and housing, providing mentorship and tutoring, or serving on the board of a nonprofit.

Financial donors report that they feel more personally connected to the philanthropic efforts and find it most rewarding when they contribute their time in addition to money.

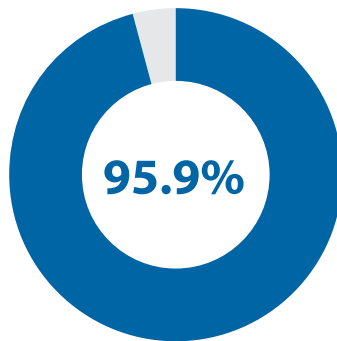
“When we see people in need, we presume they want financial support. It took me a while to realize that giving your time is also philanthropy.”

“I want to be able to show them that you can give back without having a dollar to your name or anything. This is your time, which is free.”

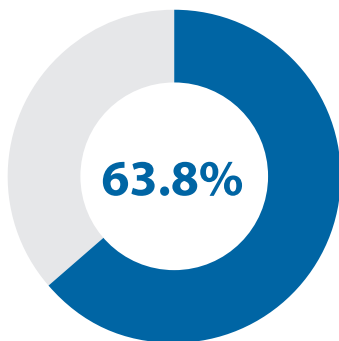
Donated Items



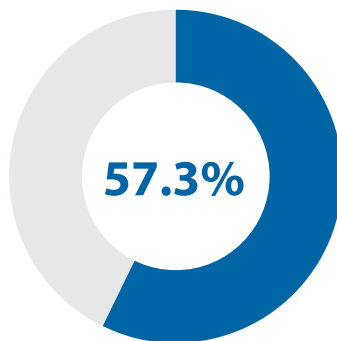
Donated Money



Gave my time through volunteering



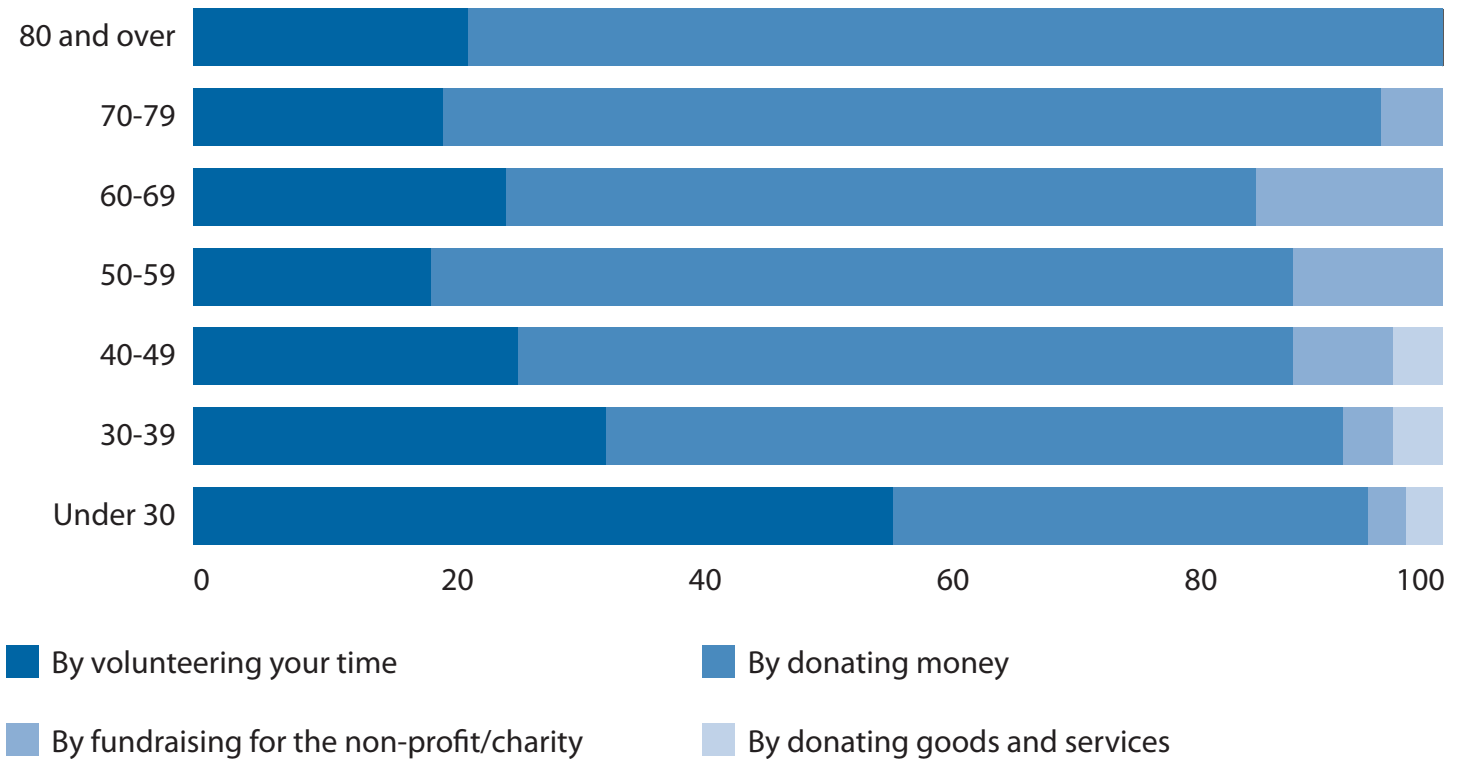
Gave my skills and expertise



Younger respondents were more likely to see volunteering as the way to make a bigger difference for organizations than older respondents.

Arab Americans are generous with their time (contd.)

How can you make the biggest difference for organizations?

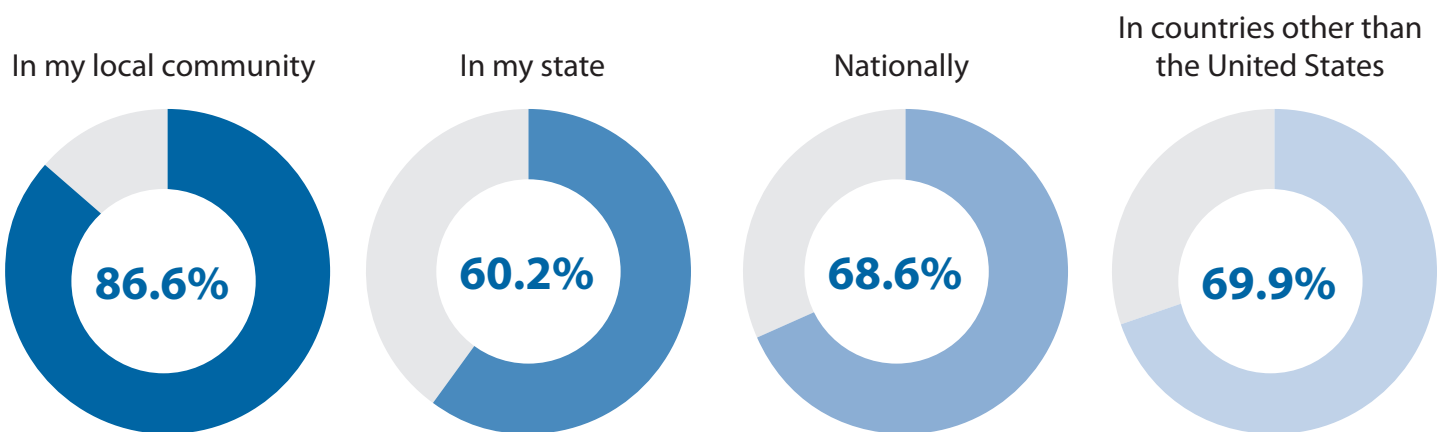


It is common for those who are early in their careers to give their time as a resource, and those who are later in their careers to mentor others to pass on the skills and knowledge they've gained.

Arab Americans give significantly in the United States and in their local communities

While participants spoke extensively about giving in Arab American communities and giving to causes overseas, the survey and focus groups also highlight the fact that Arab Americans give heavily in their local communities and within the U.S. When participants were asked to identify organizations that they consistently support, they mentioned local social service organizations and organizations based in the United States. Arab American philanthropy is making a significant impact in the U.S., not just in other countries.

Over the past 3 years I gave to causes ...



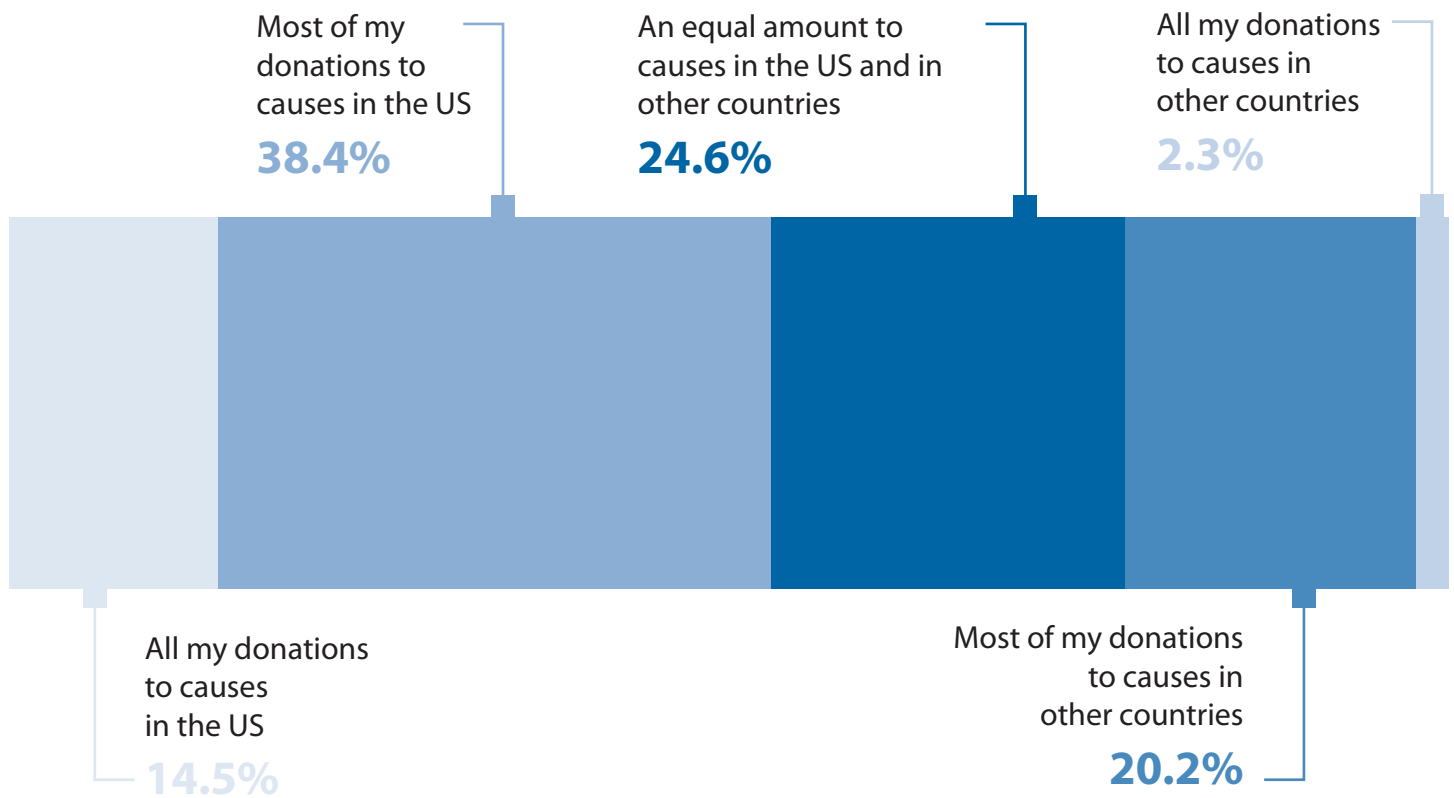
When given the option to check all that apply, people seem to give across the board (to causes in community, state, nationally and internationally) with an emphasis on giving to the local community.

Arab Americans give significantly in the United States and in their local communities (contd.)

Just over half of the survey respondents gave most or all their giving in the United States. In contrast, less than 25% gave most or all of their giving overseas.

Unsurprisingly, the longer a donor's family has lived in the United States, the more likely they were to give more in the United States than in other countries compared to those who are recent immigrants.

Over the past 3 years I gave...

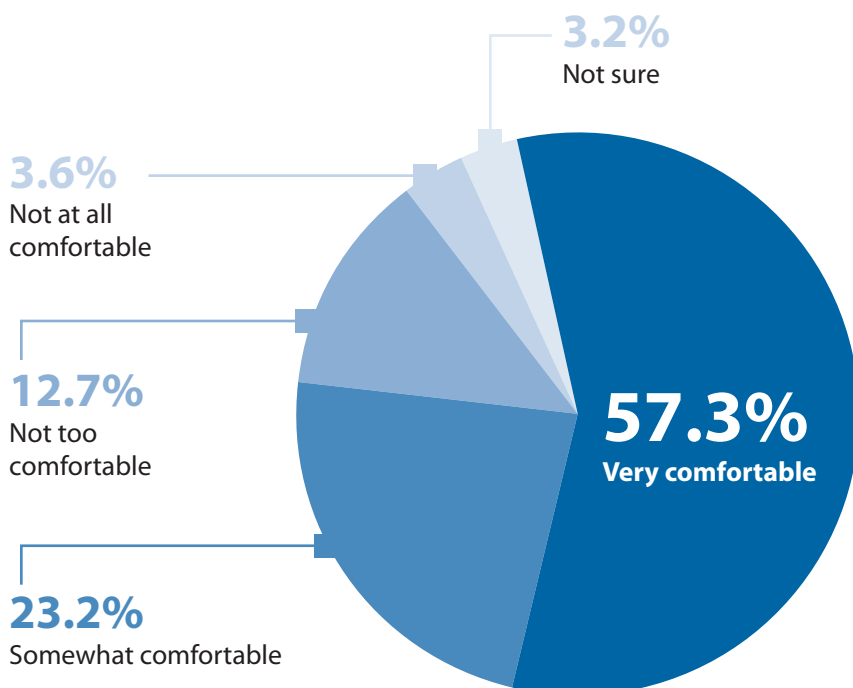


Arab Americans recognize the power of collective giving

For many participants in the focus groups, philanthropy reflected more than their personal experiences or identity. Participants see philanthropy as an opportunity to reshape the narrative of Arab Americans, to tell a story about Arab American contributions to American society and leave a legacy for future generations. When Arab Americans come together in their giving, that impact is even more powerful. For many participants, CAAP plays a key role in engaging the collective power of giving in the Arab American community, bringing donors together to increase the impact of their giving and elevate the role of Arab American philanthropy in American society.

Nearly 65% of respondents indicated that they gave through a community foundation, such as CAAP. This figure may be much higher than Arab Americans in general, as most respondents to the survey had some connection to the CAAP. While the reasons people give through a community foundation may be myriad, one reason often cited by CAAP donors is the ability to leverage their giving with others to increase their effectiveness.

Which best describes how comfortable you are sharing information with others about the organizations you support?



"I am super excited about CAAP because all of us together can make a difference. We may not be able to give them millions, but by putting our money together, putting our passions together, we can definitely make a difference."

"Individually we may have some ability, but collectively we can make a bigger difference, a bigger donation."

Over 80% of respondents are very or somewhat comfortable sharing information about the organizations they support. In addition, 67% of respondents promote organizations they support on social media and email. Focus group participants talked about inviting their peers to support organizations they care about as a way to leverage their giving with others for greater impact

Arab American Giving Unique Among Communities of Color

While many of the giving themes identified in this report may resonate with other giving communities, a few differences emerged based on comparison with Blackbaud Institute’s Diversity in Giving February 2015 report, particularly in attitudes around giving and giving priorities.

Giving Priorities

Arab Americans were more likely to support organizations engaged in direct services than other communities, including emergency relief efforts, local social service agencies and immigrant rights.

Arab Americans were also more likely to support youth development and education related organizations than other communities.

Personal connections and responsibility

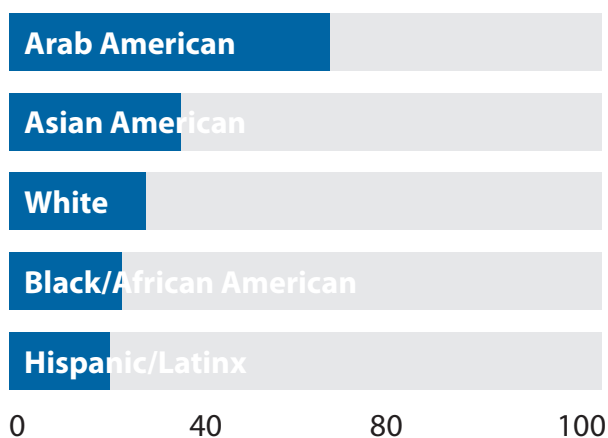
Arab Americans are more likely than other communities to be actively engaged in giving through volunteerism and advocacy and are more proactive about engaging their friends and family in their giving through email and social media, reinforcing the deeply personal nature of Arab American giving.

Arab Americans were also more likely than other communities to report that they would give more to nonprofits they care about but don’t know how or would support more organizations if asked. Finally, the data further highlighted the responsibility Arab Americans feel towards giving. Arab Americans were far more likely to report that they have a responsibility to give than other communities.

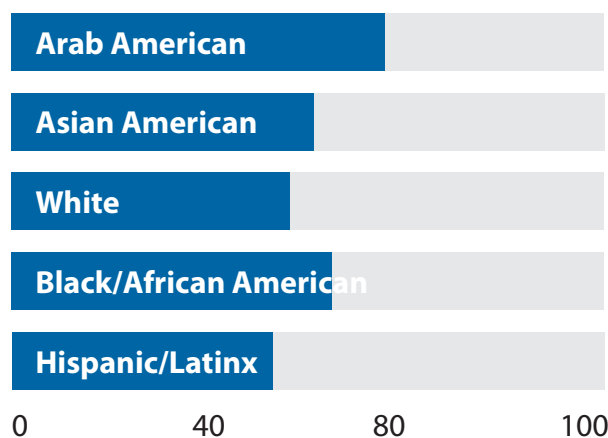
A Note on Comparing Data

It is important to note that any comparison between Arab American giving and other communities should not be considered an exact comparison. The Blackbaud data was collected seven years before CAAP’s data, and giving priorities and attitudes may have changed over time in the communities originally surveyed. In addition, the CAAP data was primarily gathered from Arab Americans connected with CAAP or other Arab American organizations, who may already align their giving with their Arab American identity. In contrast, the Blackbaud data was collected from donors to non-ethnic nonprofit organizations.

Donors who reported giving to emergency relief efforts



Donors who feel a responsibility to support nonprofits through volunteering



Conclusion

Arab Americans have made diverse and meaningful contributions in all aspects of American society, including through their philanthropy. Arab American giving is uniquely connected to each philanthropist's individual story while beautifully blending the immigrant experience with traditional philanthropic structures in this country. No story about the philanthropy of diverse communities is complete without Arab American inclusion.

Institutions like the Center for Arab American Philanthropy will continue to play an important role as a space in which Arab Americans can strengthen the impact of their giving, coordinate their giving with others, and uplift the narrative of Arab American giving in American society.

"We are a group of very successful, intelligent, hardworking people that care about humankind. And, when we put our mind to it through organized philanthropy, we can make changes that benefit everyone."

About the Center for Arab American Philanthropy

The Center for Arab American Philanthropy (CAAP) is a national community foundation. An institution of ACCESS, CAAP's objective is to unite and empower the Arab American community by demonstrating the impact of giving together. CAAP improves communities by making grants to nonprofit organizations; serves donors by providing them with smart tools and resources to carry out their philanthropic giving; builds leaders by educating and inspiring Arab Americans, including youth, to realize their potential for change; and most of all, shapes perceptions about Arab Americans by highlighting their generous heritage and exceptional contributions to society. Visit www.centeraap.org to learn more.

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