

VOLUNTEERING VS. DONATING

Aligning Resources for Maximum Impact

At some point, every thoughtful donor faces an important decision: **How should I direct my generosity to create the greatest possible impact?**

While both volunteering and financial giving are meaningful, they are not interchangeable. The effectiveness of each ultimately comes down to how well your resources align with the needs of the organizations you support.

YOU HAVE A LOT TO GIVE

Rather than comparing time versus money, the more productive approach is to evaluate your philanthropic capital: your full set of resources and how you can use them intentionally.

You have at least three types of philanthropic capital at your disposal:

1. **Financial capital:** Your ability to fund programs, scale solutions, and provide stability.
2. **Human capital:** Your skills, expertise, leadership, and judgment.
3. **Social capital:** Your relationships, credibility, and influence.

Many donors find it helpful to align different forms of support with the specific needs of an organization.

For example, a donor funding a pilot program is deploying financial capital. A CPA serving on a nonprofit finance committee is deploying human capital. A well-connected business owner introducing donors is deploying social capital.

WHEN VOLUNTEERING CREATES REAL IMPACT

Volunteering can be especially powerful when you bring skills that aren't easily replaced. Board governance, legal expertise, financial oversight, strategic planning, and fundraising leadership can truly change the trajectory of an organization. Growing nonprofits, in particular, often need capable hands and wise counsel as much as funding.

For many people, volunteering also feels deeply personal. You see the mission firsthand. You meet the people affected. You experience the work up close.

And there's something else we don't talk about enough:

Volunteering can also offer a more personal kind of impact, such as building relationships and expanding your network. It gives you stories to tell your children. Serving on a board or participating in a community event can be energizing in ways that writing a check simply can't.

For families, volunteering together can become part of family culture, and something children remember long after any dollar amount is forgotten.

WHEN FINANCIAL GIVING MAY BE MORE EFFECTIVE

For some people, or at certain times, financial capital can be the most efficient tool for impact.

Established, well-run organizations often benefit more from unrestricted funding than additional volunteers. For some individuals, financial contributions may be a more efficient way to support certain organizations, depending on their circumstances.

Financial giving can extend further than individual time. In some cases, financial contributions can help fund programs, support staffing, or contribute to operational stability.

THE BIGGER GOAL

The goal isn't to choose sides between time and money. It's to align your strongest resource with where it can do the most good.

As you consider how you want to show up, consider three questions:

1. **Capacity:** What do I realistically have the most to offer right now – money, time, or expertise?
2. **Need:** Where is this organization most in need of support?
3. **Sustainability:** What kind of involvement can I maintain over time?

Often, the answer becomes clearer when you look at where all three align. For many thoughtful donors, the answer is not either volunteering or donating. It's both.

And remember, there's no single right answer—and no final one. All types of giving are an expression of generosity, and what fits today may evolve as your life and resources change.

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