Centering Proximity

Why giving platforms should center the organizations on the frontlines of social change

IDEO Radiant.

Acknowledgments

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

This publication is the result of a project conducted by IDEO, a global design firm, and Radiant Strategies, a boutique consulting firm advising on equity in philanthropy. The project's purpose was to engage and center the voices of proximate leaders in identifying opportunities for giving platforms to shift more everyday donor dollars to proximate organizations. This publication intends to serve as a starting point for conversation and action in the giving platform ecosystem. This report was made possible through the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was authored by Nicole Zhao, Milan Gary, Nseke Ngilbus, Kate Schnippering, and Stuart Getty of IDEO; and Isis Krause, Letarik Amare, and Hali Lee of Radiant Strategies. Thank you to Agus Galmarini and Sophie Snowden of BMGF who reviewed the report and served as thought-partners in the process. Isabella Levethan and Tanya Kar visually designed the publication and associated [website](). We are grateful to the individuals who generously shared their experiences and time with us.

METHODOLOGY

We interviewed 30 US-based leaders and groups, including 25 proximate leaders and five broader giving infrastructure organizations. These interviews were 60 minutes long and conducted virtually. Quotes have been edited for clarity. We also conducted research on major giving platforms and giving statistics and trends, as well as informal surveys of everyday givers. The scope of the research is US-based.

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Why This Work Matters

Social change happens in communities. And proximate organizations make that change happen.

Proximate organizations* are those closest to the causes and the communities they're directly serving.

They *are* these communities.

Their work advances:

BETTER SCHOOLS
FOOD ACCESS
AFFORDABLE HOUSING
EQUAL JUSTICE
SAFER NEIGHBORHOODS
ELDER CARE
EMPOWERED COMMUNITIES
DIAPER ACCESS
WORKER RIGHTS
POLITICAL POWER
CIVIL RIGHTS
JUST ECONOMIES

AND SO MUCH MORE.

This is the work the world needs. Yet it's not what's getting funded.

Proximate organizations are often (not always) small in size. Though nonprofits with less than $1M in budget represent <u>92% of nonprofits</u>, they only receive around <u>20% of individual donations</u>.[1,2]

More and more giving is happening online – increasing by over <u>42%</u> in the past three years alone. Online giving platforms are also growing, playing an increasingly important role in facilitating those donations.[3,4]

Imagine a world where online giving platforms channeled more of the power and promise of generosity to these proximate organizations.

This publication focuses on that possibility.

It is the output of listening to 25 leaders of proximate organizations – just a microcosm of the thousands of leaders working in communities around the country.

Meet the 25 leaders. They represent a wide range of proximate organizations—national and local, fiscally sponsored, 501c3 nonprofits, 501c4 nonprofits, and budgets ranging from $80k to $5 million—all deeply rooted in communities.
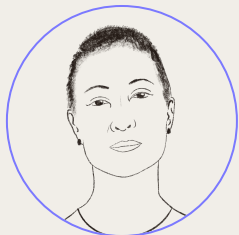
TAIJ KUMARIE MOTEELALL
Media Sutra

ALICIA LARA
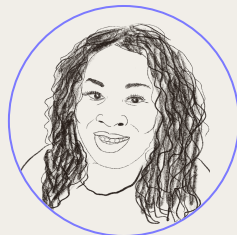Community Partners

ANONYMOUS C3 NON-PROFIT LEADER

BELINDA HERNANDEZ ARRIAGA
ALAS - Ayudando Latinos A Soñar

YIN Q
Red Canary Song & Kink Out

CYNTHIA YONGVANG
United Hmong with Disabilities

DARONESHIA DUNCAN-BOYD
Transgender Advocates Knowledgeable Empowering (TAKE) Resource Center
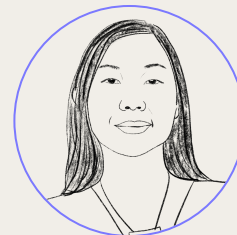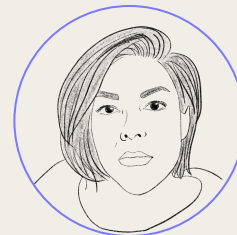
HELEN LEUNG
LA Más

PILAR WEISS
National movement scaffolding and support organization

DIRECTOR OF A GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING GROUP WITH A C3 AND A C4

LORI RICHARDS
Beaches Emergency Assistance Ministry (BEAM)

ANATHEA CHINO
Advance Native Political Leadership

We believe the change we need in the giving space will come from listening to these leaders and organizations.

RAZIYA HILL
Every Bottom Covered, Inc.

JAIME ZAVALA
artworxLA

SOPHIA PARK
Fractured Atlas

ANONYMOUS SOCIALLY ENGAGED ARTIST

STEPHANIE FLEMING
African Diaspora Art Museum of Atlanta (ADAMA)

PALLAVI KIDAMBI
Hip Hop for Change
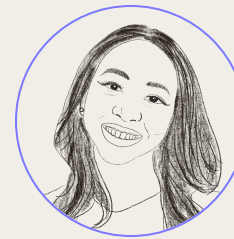
BRITTANY BRADY
National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity

RUDY ESPINOZA
Inclusive Action for the City

RAVEN WILKERSON
Out of Bounds Support

PARIS HATCHER
Black Feminist Future

A fiscally sponsored organization building queer and transgender Asian and Pacific Islander power

LUCIA TORRES
Las Fotos Project

JACOB MARTINEZ
Digital NEST

The natural architects for social change are the leaders and organizations who are proximate to the issues being addressed.

Proximity can be geographic as well as experiential. Organizations working in communities know what their communities need. Leaders with similar lived experiences have deep, personal, even historical knowledge of issues and problems. They have the best perspectives to identify and create relevant and durable solutions.

Proximate organizations are the first responders in any crisis—slow or sudden. By facing the root causes of systemic issues, proximate organizations help communities cultivate self-determination and capacity to thrive.

When proximate organizations join forces, they are often leaders and participants in movements.

Giving platforms first need to ensure that the flow of funding is possible, promoted, and timely for proximate organizations to thrive on their platforms. In addition, platforms can promote proximity by highlighting for donors the stories of proximate leaders and groups and helping make meaningful connections to them.

Major social movements, like the Marriage Equality and Civil Rights movements, start not because of institutions, but because—relationship by relationship—proximate organizations create change from the ground up.[5]

The future of giving is more socially conscious and community-minded than ever.

It's time to meet that future.

HIGHLIGHT

While continuing to funnel more money and attention to the biggest, most well-known organizations would be easy, the Curb Cut effect shows that designing for equity and access delivers outsized benefits for *everyone*.[7]

Everyday givers are key for the sustained, unrestricted funding proximate organizations need.

Nonprofits are funded by multiple sources.[17] Many of these sources, like philanthropic gifts and government grants, can be restricted to project-based funding. Everyday givers have the potential to provide a sustainable source of **unrestricted funds** that nonprofits can use as they see fit.

Research shows that organizations with a broad base of support are more resilient to fundraising shocks. The latest data from Giving USA shows that nonprofits in the US continue to rely on a smaller, more affluent circle of donors as the number of individual donors declines. The combination of factors is contributing to an overall decline in charitable giving.[18]

Beyond monetary donations everyday givers often volunteer their time, contribute their skills, and/or lend their voices to causes and organizations that are seeking partners—not just funders—in their work.

DEFINITION

For the purposes of this report, everyday givers are ordinary community members contributing as little as $1 and as much as $10K total to an organization in one year - sharing their money, skills, voice and goods in potentially small but meaningful ways.

"To the extent that we are raising our own grassroots money, we have much more self-determination about what we do with those dollars."

—DIRECTOR OF GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATION WITH C3 AND C4

"One of our pain points with grant money is that there's plenty of grants for programs and not enough grants for actually running your organization."

—STEPHANIE FLEMING, INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, AFRICAN DIASPORA ART MUSEUM OF ATLANTA (ADAMA)

"The way that I talk to donors, it's not about 'Please give to the poor.' It's about, 'I need you to join us. There's a role for you to play.' That's the deepness of solidarity. That['s what] we're seeking, it's not a donation that others us."

—RUDY ESPINOZA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, INCLUSIVE ACTION FOR THE CITY

Giving platforms can accelerate a more equitable future, by doing what they already do, *better*.

Giving platforms provide a place for people to connect to causes and organizations they care about. They are a powerful tool communities can leverage to build a better world. Today, platforms create a feel-good, easy giving experience for donors, and it's paying off: online giving is growing.

While the sector is benefitting from growth, money is disproportionately flowing to the most well-known nonprofits. **Impact is being left on the table.** Platforms have an opportunity to create tools and features that channel donations more equitably.

Instead of trying to design for *all* nonprofits, platforms have an opportunity to flip the paradigm and start with what community-led organizations need.

They can prioritize discovery, connecting donors to essential organizations they did not know existed. They can create tools to deepen relationships between organizations and donors, an essential ingredient to meaningful and sustainable social change. The next section of the report will identify five major shifts to advance equity in the giving ecosystem.

DEFINITION

A "giving platform" is a third-party, online platform that facilitates giving.

For smaller organizations, online giving matters: while online giving represented 12% of total fundraising for nonprofits overall, it represented 18% of total fundraising for small organizations.[3]

Smaller organizations' online giving growth lagged far behind other organizations. In 2021, online giving grew by 9% for nonprofits overall, but only 4% for small nonprofits – indicating a clear opportunity to level the playing field.[3]

Each giving platform has a different role to play.

We have identified three informal roles giving platforms play in the ecosystem: social fundraising, aggregators & raters, and directors. A variety of giving platforms have features that span multiple roles. The below examples are illustrative and not exhaustive.

👍 SOCIAL FUNDRAISING

Where people connect with each other and the organizations they care about.

Where organizations might post calls for donations, stories of impact, updates to donors and the general public on what they are working on.

May enable fundraising campaigns and peer to peer fundraising.

For example:
- **Crowdfunding platforms** like ioby and GoFundMe
- **Social media platforms** with fundraising features like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitch
- **"All in one" nonprofit giving platforms** with social giving features like ActBlue, Classy, and Mightycause

✔ AGGREGATORS & RATERS

Where people go to research and build trust and confidence in choices.

Aim to primarily serve as research and education tools for donors seeking organizations to give to.

May evaluate and "rate" organizations based on criteria such as financial transparency, accountability, and impact, to help people decide whether to donate.

May also facilitate and process donations.

For example:
- **Aggregators** like Giving Gap and every.org
- **Raters** like Charity Navigator and Candid

📢 DIRECTORS

Where people go to pool their gifts, and place their trust in advocates and experts.

Coordinate people's time and funds, directing support to an organization or group of organizations.
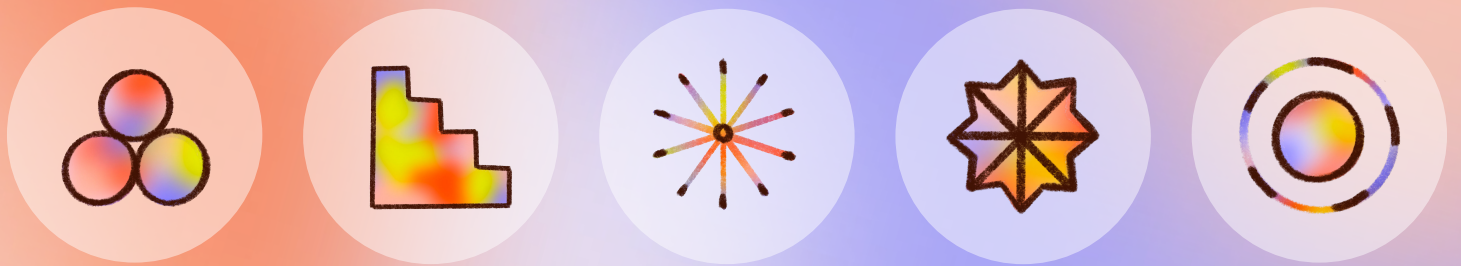
Giving is often anonymous.

Through donor participation or advocacy, these platforms help unlock new capital, such as company matching.

For example:
- **Giving circles** create communities on Grapevine
- **Workplace giving** platforms like Benevity, Millie, and Bright Funds
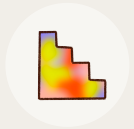
Shifts in the Ecosystem

The Shifts

What does it mean to center proximate organizations? We've identified **five core shifts** for giving platforms to advance equity in the giving ecosystem.

SHIFT 01

Individual Organizations → Ecosystem Partners

Support ecosystems, recognizing that no single organization or giving platform creates sustained social change.

SHIFT 02

Funding the Moment → Funding the Movement

Catalyze sustained support, to fund movements that reduce future crises.

SHIFT 03

Transactional → Relational

Anchor on building deeper relationships amongst donors and organizations to fuel longer-term impact.

SHIFT 04

Simplicity → the Full Story

Create more space to elevate the nuance and depth of systems change work.

SHIFT 05

Invisibility → Intentionality

Intentionally foster trust for fiscally sponsored and other proximate organizations beyond financial metrics.

SHIFT 01

Individual Organizations

→

Ecosystem Partners

CALL TO ACTION

Support ecosystems, recognizing that no single organization or giving platform creates sustained social change.

HOW IT IS TODAY

Platforms don't recognize that they are part of an ecosystem, and dollars most often flow to single organizations.

WHY DOES PROXIMITY MATTER HERE?

Proximate organizations have the on-the-ground relationships and knowledge to work in coalition with one another to enact change.

LEARNING 01

Proximate organizations already work in coalition with each other. Yet, platforms structure donations primarily by organization, rather than cause or coalition, which pits organizations against each other for attention and dollars.

Many platforms showcase individual organizational profiles and stories. In this system, donors are driven to make a single choice.

The organizations best positioned to benefit in this structure tend to be the most well-known, largest, and well-resourced: those with large marketing departments and name-brand recognition.

But sustained social change does not happen when one organization receives funds, attention, and influence over many others. Donors know this, too – many donors now are motivated to give to a cause rather than an institution.[6]

Proximate leaders interviewed said they wished more platforms enabled collaborative fundraising so they could uplift the other organizations they work with.

Platforms have an opportunity to design for the reality of coalition and redistribution that proximate organizations already engage in, and that donors already look for—in service of channeling more dollars to organizations working together to create social change.

"For us, it's around telling the story around, 'This is what the movement looks like.' Not just what we're doing.

A lot of organizations position themselves as the one and only. That creates a level of competition that's just not true."

–PARIS HATCHER,
FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR,
BLACK FEMINIST FUTURE

"The reason why it's competitive is because a lot of tenets of philanthropy are directly from the tenets of white supremacy*. So, you're gonna compete for these dollars, you're gonna beg, you're gonna scrounge, you're gonna do whatever you gotta do. But in reality, abundance is abundance."
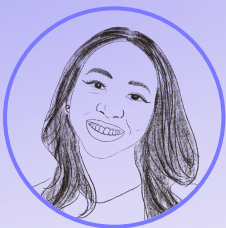
—BRITTANY BRADY, CEO, NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR PARTNERSHIPS IN EQUITY

*TENETS OF WHITE SUPREMACY?

A sense of urgency, believing in objectivity, worshipping the written word, individualism, believing progress means bigger, and perfectionism are some of the characteristics of white supremacy culture. This culture is embedded in many institutions, and enables a power elite (white) to maintain power over others (non-white).[16]

LEARNING 02

Competition on an unfair playing field requires capacity that proximate organizations lack.

The complex and competitive nature of the fundraising ecosystem means that organizations without capacity to navigate it, often those organizations who are busy acting as the first responders on-the-ground, miss opportunities they could be a good fit for.

The sheer **number of giving platforms available is overwhelming** for proximate organizations, which tend to have limited development staff in a sector of high turnover.[9]

Because of limited time, some proximate organizations invest in completing grant applications that have the potential of larger sums of money.

However, this hinders organizations from dedicating the needed time to assess multiple platform options, diversify their fundraising methods, and foster individual relationships that lead to sustained giving.

"One of our biggest weaknesses as a grassroots organization is that we're not able to fully develop the relationships with our individual donors, because our development person is so heavily focused on trying to get [grant applications] out the door."

—LUCIA TORRES,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
LAS FOTOS PROJECT

"Not every small organization has a Development Director that knows intimately all these platforms. There's always new stuff popping up. I would have to learn about what they do. I want it to be simple."

—PALLAVI KIDAMBI,
GRANTS MANAGER,
HIP HOP FOR CHANGE

LEARNING 02

"One of the biggest problems is that nonprofits are being sold constantly from different platforms. So, it's hard for organizations, especially smaller ones that don't have as much resources, to trust any of these and decide where you're going to go. Once you decide, it's hard to pull out. It's scary for nonprofits."

—JACOB MARTINEZ,
CEO, DIGITAL NEST

SHIFT 02

Funding the Moment

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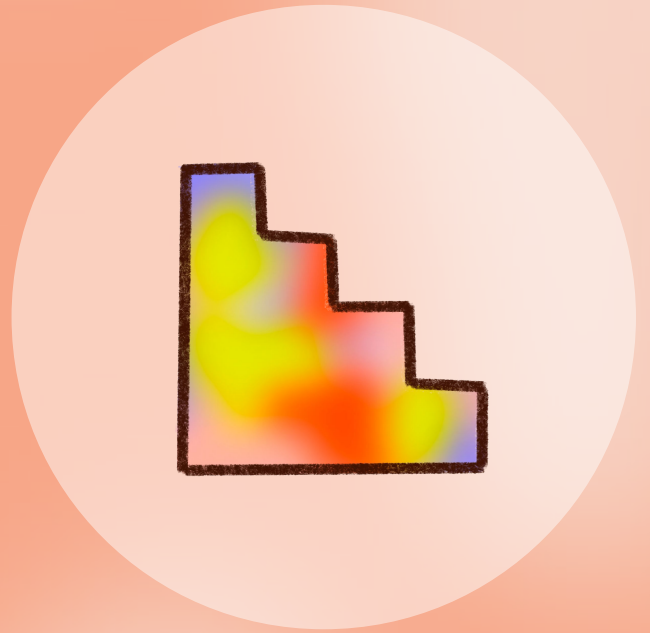
Funding The Movement

CALL TO ACTION

Catalyze sustained support, to fund movements that reduce future crises.

HOW IT IS TODAY

After national crises, proximate organizations receive a substantial increase in public attention and dollars, resulting in both gratitude and overwhelm. Once the crises recedes in the eyes of donors, the funding tends to disappear alongside it.

WHY DOES PROXIMITY MATTER HERE?

When a national or regional crisis occurs, urgency and sympathy run high. The media and platforms suddenly amplify hyperlocal organizations. These are the organizations working hand-in-hand with communities already, who can rapidly mobilize to address the crisis. But these organizations don't just address moments of crises, they are often tackling the root causes of these crises year-round.

LEARNING 03

"ALAS has been here for 10 years, but the only reason why we've really gotten help and grown is out of tragedy. We've been first responders for COVID. That's when we really started to grow. Then we had the wildfires and we got funding for that. Then, the flooding and the economic crisis, and now the shooting. It's really sad that it's taken tragedies to make our work visible."

—BELINDA HERNANDEZ
ARRIAGA,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
ALAS- AYUDANDO LATINOS
A SOÑAR

LEARNING 03

Crisis cycles place proximate organizations in and out of feast and famine mode in regards to funding. What they need instead is sustainable, dependable, regular general operating support, and everyday donors are a critical piece of this funding infrastructure.

Crises lead to a deluge of **funding, increased media coverage, and warranted public attention** – particularly for proximate organizations. But after the crisis has passed, attention and funding fade and the proximate organization's support base often reverts back to a pre-crisis state.

Giving data on certain giving platforms bears this out: In 2021, causes fighting Asian hate, including Chinese for Affirmative Action and Advancing Justice-AAJC, came into focus and moved from being ranked ~49,000 and ~76,000 in donations received on one workplace giving platform to #34 and #36, respectively.

The same happened to organizations addressing racial justice after the 2020 racial justice uprising. In 2021, among the organizations that moved off the list of top 10 organizations to whom people donated are NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund and Equal Justice Initiative.[11]

Platforms have an opportunity to nudge and convert donors who give once in a crisis—like those who live locally or share demographic factors with impacted communities—into long-term supporters.

"We don't need you showing up for us when you think it's a crisis. We need you to show up for us daily because living in the world, being Black first and being trans second—that's a double crisis daily."

—DARONESHIA DUNCAN-BOYD,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
TRANSGENDER ADVOCATES KNOWLEDGEABLE
EMPOWERING (TAKE) RESOURCE CENTER

LEARNING 04

Proximate organizations would benefit from support managing the scrutiny that follows an influx of funding.

After receiving a high influx of funding, proximate organizations said they must immediately field questions about **where they have spent the funds and how quickly**—a level of scrutiny the public does not often apply to larger or more well-resourced organizations. The increased scrutiny combined with the systemic underfunding and constrained capacity of these organizations makes for an untenable combination.

Proximate organization leaders said they must also make difficult decisions regarding fund allocations as they balance rapid response with long-term sustainability.

In some cases—if the organization adapts to changing contexts and/or prioritizes differently than originally expected—the organization may fall out of public favor and lose donors.

Organizations cannot address the root causes of issues if they are not being properly funded and promoted longer-term, beyond a crisis.

"We kind of walk this strange balance of, we wanna get money out to as many people as possible, whoever needs it. And then at the same time, how do you base-build with it? How do we keep this sustainable?"

—YIN Q,
CORE MEMBER, RED CANARY
SONG & KINK OUT

"We grew exponentially in 2020 around George Floyd's murder. Folks were like, I just really want to support Black work. And then what happens is that there's an unrealistic expectation on Black organizations to change the world all the time."

—PARIS HATCHER,
FOUNDER &
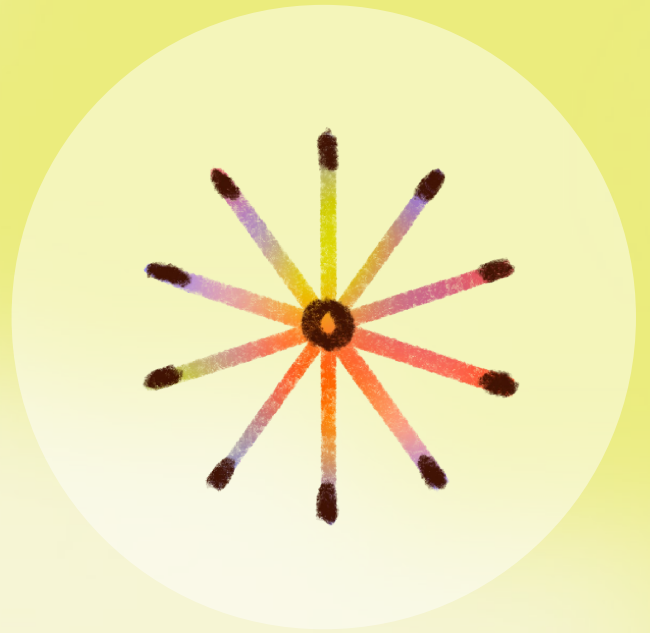EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BLACK
FEMINIST FUTURE

"It's not just about giving diapers right now at this moment, but it's about parents missing work, children missing school, emergency rooms filled with things that we can prevent, and letting them know it's not gonna change overnight."

–RAZIYA HILL,
FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
EVERY BOTTOM COVERED, INC.

SHIFT 03

Transactional

⟶

Relational

CALL TO ACTION

Anchor on catalyzing deeper relationships amongst donors and organizations to fuel longer-term impact.

HOW IT IS TODAY

Anonymous gifts, without relationships, are of limited value to proximate organizations. Sustained change won't come from donations alone.

WHY DOES PROXIMITY MATTER HERE?

Proximate organizations may not have staff dedicated to all aspects of the on-the-ground work they are doing; the name-brand recognition to have large volunteer bases; or the high-profile connections to access major gifts. This makes fostering personal relationships with givers paramount for proximate organizations so they can become long-term supporters and advocates.

LEARNING 05

Money is absolute, but relationships are exponential.

Everyday giving is most valuable and sustained when giving goes beyond transactions and extends into a relationship. When people contribute skills, time or connections beyond giving money—they feel deeply connected to the organization's people and mission.

Some proximate organization leaders said that **when people donate money without connection and relationship, it can create a savior complex** that starts and ends with the transaction.

Proximate organizations are craving these meaningful relationships with givers. Giving platforms have a unique opportunity to facilitate engaging connections with new audiences who are looking beyond traditional forms of giving.

Effectively facilitating financial transactions is important, but it shouldn't be the end goal. It should be the beginning: a catalyst for long-term and multi-faceted support.

Particularly for systems change organizations: movements don't just need money, they need a support base.

"Before giving platforms can get to "relational", we need to be doing the "transactional" really well, and right now "transactional" is often not working well." - Iara Peng, CEO of JustFund, speaking at the BMGF Greater Giving Summit, April 2023

"One thing that I think about in the future is if we are able to build a base of individual donors, it's not just the money, as we've been talking about, it's the friendships.

It's like you're mobilizing a base of people that are supporting the efforts of the organization. There's no connection and I'm seeking solidarity."

—RUDY ESPINOZA,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
INCLUSIVE ACTION FOR THE CITY

"One example is Converse. So that relationship grew and grew from not just them supporting us through grant funds, but also supporting us with opportunities for our students to do things like photograph some of their material or to be part of their different campaigns."

—LUCIA TORRES,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
LAS FOTOS PROJECT

For Las Fotos Project, everyday supporters were pivotal to introducing the majority of their corporate giving relationships today.

LEARNING 05

"Oftentimes [we are] the first place that people feel like they belong ever, sometimes ever in their whole lives.

At its best, it also means that people are willing to do brave things with us. It is because people feel belonging that we can push them to do something like ask for help and ask for money.

When they donate to us, they're part of something bigger than that dollar. They're contributing to something bigger than any one-time donation because we're creating that world together. People come in, get involved, and potentially it leads to involvement that is much more proactive and responsible than the initial touch."

—A FISCALLY SPONSORED ORGANIZATION BUILDING QUEER AND TRANSGENDER ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER POWER

Simplicity

→

The Full Story

CALL TO ACTION

Create more space to elevate the nuance and depth of systems change work.

HOW IT IS TODAY

Proximate organizations working on systems change find it harder to tell their story of impact within tight word count constraints and simple profiles.

WHY DOES PROXIMITY MATTER HERE?

Many proximate organizations engage in systems change work, including but not limited to advocacy, research, narrative storytelling, power-building, community-building, and other activities that address deep, systemic issues. The work can be less tangible and concrete than direct service work, which often includes the delivery of items, activities, or services that can easily be counted and tracked.

LEARNING 06

"We can share who we're about, but I don't know if that's even compelling if you're putting an organization like ours next to something that is so international or established.

Many big, established nonprofits are going to be easier to understand than place-based anti-gentrification, challenging the norms of white supremacy and capitalism.

We're just not going to be able to communicate that on a platform and be competitive."
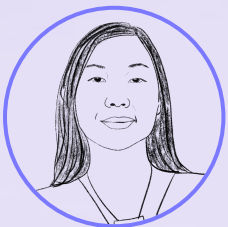
—HELEN LEUNG,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, LA
MÁS

LEARNING 06

Long-term social change work is not easy to communicate. But there's a growing audience that cares about social change.

The work that proximate organizations do to address systemic issues is long-term, complex, and often intangible.

Several proximate organization leaders said that **people often find it easier to donate to feeding a child or saving an animal, rather than fighting gentrification or building political power.** Many platforms cater to this simplicity, spotlighting the most established and easiest-to-understand organizations and drawing parallels to e-commerce.

Younger generations and people of color are increasingly making up current and future donors. They're revitalizing support for broader, multi-issue social causes, such as racial justice, indicating greater desire and capacity to understand and support nuanced work.

Platforms can create tools to make it easier to tell complex stories of impact, and explore the importance of movement-building work in ways new audiences can engage.

It's more important than ever to invite in younger donors, to strongly signal that they're needed (they're well aware nonprofits are pursuing high-dollar donors), and show that their gifts will have an impact greater than socially responsible shopping.[8]

"**Many of our [fiscally sponsored] projects aren't focused on providing direct services. Many are focused on movement building, narrative building, advocacy, and community organizing. These approaches aren't given to the general and sometimes simple, 'If you give me $10, it buys a meal.'**

— ALICIA LARA,
PRESIDENT & CEO,
COMMUNITY PARTNERS

A recent study found that more donors value long-term results (31.9%) over immediate results (20.7%).[12]

Younger Americans are more likely to give to racial and social justice, as are African American and Asian American donors.[3] Given future demographic trends in the US, platforms have an opportunity to meet increasing donor demand and channel more funding toward social and racial justice causes.

Among Gen Zers, 52% felt that shopping at social responsible businesses had the same or greater impact as donating to nonprofits.[8]

LEARNING 07

Proximate organizations often have to overcome stigma and stereotypes about the communities they are a part of and serve.

In addition to the effort to stand out online alongside well-known nonprofits with charitable missions, organizations serving smaller communities face **an additional burden of overcoming stereotypes and lack of awareness** about the communities they serve.

Several proximate organization leaders said that donors and funders may not even know the community exists, let alone its unique context and needs.

Lack of cultural competency and awareness further compromises these organization's ability to reach and appeal to new donors and supporters, especially online.

"Showing a contemporary view of Indigenous people is really challenging to do on a website. [One funder] wanted to meditate with me and sit with an Indigenous person on the line. I am a queer, Native woman leading a national organization doing historic work, and you are focused on this romanticized version and stereotyped version of Indigenous people. It takes us a minute to get through that."

—ANATHEA CHINO,
CO-FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR, ADVANCE NATIVE
POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

"If they want to fund an Asian group, they will probably just identify those major big Asian groups. You're talking about the Japanese, the Korean, the Filipino. But smaller communities, like ours, the Hmong community, they probably don't even know about us."

—CYNTHIA YONGVANG, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
UNITED HMONG WITH DISABILITIES

SHIFT 05

Invisibility

→

Intentionality

CALL TO ACTION

Intentionally foster trust for fiscally sponsored and other proximate organizations beyond financial metrics.

HOW IT IS TODAY

Financial accountability, transparency, and 501c3 status are held up as the beacons of organizational legitimacy.

While these are important, they shouldn't be the sole view of legitimacy.

WHY DOES PROXIMITY MATTER HERE?

The ability to be shown and fundraise on giving platforms often requires 501c3 status. The process of becoming a 501c3 nonprofit can take up to 12 months and cost up to $20,000.[19]

Proximate organizations, especially newly-formed or all-volunteer groups may not need, want, or have the capacity to pursue formalization. Fiscal sponsorship enables them to receive tax-deductible donations, apply for tax-deductible grants, and receive administrative and fiduciary support, so that they can focus on mission-critical work.

LEARNING 08

Fiscally sponsored organizations are invisible on giving platforms, eroding donor trust.

There are over 18,000 fiscally sponsored organizations as of 2023 eligible to receive tax-deductible donations, yet they cannot fundraise or be shown on certain giving platforms trusted by donors and funders.[14]

An organization becomes fiscally sponsored to augment capacity and financial infrastructure—yet donors don't know that.

When donors can't find a fiscally sponsored organization on an aggregator site, they question the organization's credibility and the legitimacy of their investment in the eyes of the IRS. This invisibility, coupled with lack of awareness around fiscal sponsorship, leads to organizations taking on the added labor of convincing donors their work is valuable and educating them about fiscal sponsorship. Not being able to fundraise for these groups also adds friction to the donor experience.

One fiscally sponsored organization leader said that even platforms that allow fiscally sponsored groups to fundraise can be frustrating because they have paperwork requirements that do not match how fiscally sponsored groups work (for example, not enabling a fiscal sponsor to indicate which sponsored group should receive funds).

Platforms have an opportunity to not only enable fiscally sponsored organizations to fundraise and be shown on their platforms, but also to educate donors on how fiscal sponsorship works so that donors understand their validity. Doing so enables more donors to give to more organizations on platforms.

"With [aggregation and rating platform] when folks find out about us, they'll look for us, they won't find us. So then they question what kind of organization we are, so there's a lot of explaining and breaking down of exactly what is the fiscally sponsored organization? We haven't been able to use [social fundraising] because we're also fiscally sponsored."

—LUCIA TORRES,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
LAS FOTOS PROJECT

"It's interoperability. [Fiscal sponsorship] is how we're set up, so giving platforms have to match that. Otherwise you're constantly giving to this small strata of very large groups."

—PILAR WEISS,
CO-FOUNDER OF A NATIONAL
MOVEMENT SCAFFOLDING AND
SUPPORT ORGANIZATION

LEARNING 08

"A lot of the groups I worked with are fiscally sponsored. It's raising the question for me of if we kind of are *invisible* to other donors, who are using these platforms to vet organizations they give to, because *we're not even present on them.*"

—TAIJ KUMARIE MOTEELALL, CO-FOUNDER, MEDIA SUTRA

LEARNING 09

Profiles and ratings based on financials are a limited view of how to build trust, obscuring and hurting the reputations of organizations doing impactful work.

Several platforms rate nonprofits and structure profiles based heavily on financial forms and tax status, particularly in the absence of an organization's materials.

While finances are an important factor in donor trust, ratings and profiles based on financials privilege organizations that already have the reputation and resources to meet those requirements. Furthermore, financial information is outdated given the backlog in Internal Revenue Service tax form updates. Despite relying on outdated information, platforms with simple profiles and ratings continue to elevate this information to donors.

Additionally, when organizations receive a poor rating, platforms do not inform these organization's leaders about why or how to correct information, leaving them feeling confused and powerless.

"For some reason, [a platform] had a rating we didn't know about or was not current to date. We don't even understand that. Like, who do you talk to at [the platform]? What did they look at? I mean, we've filed everything. So I didn't really know."

—BELINDA HERNANDEZ ARRIAGA,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ALAS -
AYUDANDO LATINOS A SOÑAR

"Everyone who gets prioritized on [giving platforms] is constantly being prioritized. So, of course they're going to keep getting the money, because they're the ones that show up, have the checkmark or the star or their names show up properly."

—PILAR WEISS,
CO-FOUNDER OF A NATIONAL
MOVEMENT SCAFFOLDING AND
SUPPORT ORGANIZATION

"Read our tax form. Does it say we legalized street vending in the state of California last year? What concerns me is when these companies say, 'Oh, we're going to grade these people, and you should give to people that have an 'A' or whatever,' because I've never even talked to any of these companies. They're faceless, and the work that we do is not faceless."

—RUDY ESPINOZA,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, INCLUSIVE
ACTION FOR THE CITY

Possibilities

Reflection questions

QUESTIONS FOR ALL PLATFORMS TO REFLECT ON

WHY— What is *your* why? What values guide your platform? How do you view your platform as part of the social change ecosystem? What world are you trying to build?

WHO— Who are you serving? Who is and isn't included on your platform? Whose story gets told?

WHERE— Where is funding currently flowing? How do dollars break down across revenue size, race/ethnicity, gender, issue area? How does this connect to the world you want to see?

HOW— How does your platform work for and with the organizations who use it? How do you gather feedback and insights from organizations outside the largest groups who are typically centered?

WHAT— What inspired you from the perspectives of the 25 leaders? What surprised or challenged you? What can you shift?

Possibilities for centering proximate organizations

STARTING POINTS FOR PLATFORMS TO ENGAGE

FOUNDATIONAL — Is your platform executing the basic transaction of donations in a timely and effective way?

INCREMENTAL — How are you onboarding and elevating proximate organizations on your specific platform?

COLLABORATIVE — How can you work with other partners and stakeholders to create systemic change?

Foundational Possibilities

Before enhancing impact and adding features that center the needs of proximate organizations, it's important to execute the basic transactions of donations well to lay the foundation for building further trust.

1. PAYOUT

When do organizations get their funds from your platform and how can that timeline be faster and more efficient?

"It bothers me that [platforms] hold on to the money for so long. It takes a long time to get the money."

—JAIME ZAVALA,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
ARTWORXLA

2. CUSTOMER SERVICE

Who can organizations reach out to if they have an issue on your platform, and what is the level of response and accessibility?

"One time we had to get something resolved and it took almost three to six months. 'Cause you're going back and forth with these people in the messages. You can't call nobody."

—DARONESHIA
DUNCAN-BOYD,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
TRANSGENDER ADVOCATES
KNOWLEDGEABLE
EMPOWERING (TAKE)
RESOURCE CENTER

3. DONOR DATA

How easily and quickly is your platform delivering donor contact information to organizations, so they can maintain relationships? (e.g., making it opt-out rather than opt-in for donors to share contact information, delivering donor reports quickly, etc.)

"If someone makes a donation in January, we won't see the report until March. So, for an organization that's passionate about individual donors, it's a whole month and a half later that I have the opportunity to thank them."

—JACOB MARTINEZ,
CEO, DIGITAL NEST

Incremental Possibilities

On top of the foundational possibilities, there are incremental possibilities platforms can explore to center and better serve proximate organizations. We've mapped the possibilities along an organization's journey on a platform. These are starting points, not answers, intended to spark imagination and action. *The following pages include additional details on each of these possibilities.*

BEING ON A PLATFORM

Eligibility: What could platforms unlock by enabling non-501c3 groups to join the platform and fundraise alongside 501c3 nonprofits?

UPDATING PROFILE

Storytelling: What could platforms unlock by enabling more multimedia storytelling and crowdsourcing content—beyond ratings and mission statements?

TRYING TO BE FOUND

Collaborative Fundraising: What could platforms unlock by facilitating more donations to coalitions of organizations or entire causes in a local area?

Curation: What could platforms unlock by elevating and amplifying proximate organizations who are mostly invisible on these platforms?

Matchmaking: What could platforms unlock by matchmaking values-aligned donors with proximate organizations working on issues they care about?

Data: What could platforms unlock by providing organizations with the donor data and insights they need to build relationships?

GETTING A DONATION

Capacity: What could platforms unlock by extending the momentum of crisis funding?

BUILDING LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS

Relationship Building: What could platforms unlock by enabling more direct and personalized connections between organizations and individuals?

Eligibility

DISCUSSION QUESTION

What could platforms unlock by enabling non-501c3 groups to join the platform and fundraise alongside 501c3 nonprofits?

BEING ON A PLATFORM — UPDATING PROFILE — TRYING TO BE FOUND — GETTING A DONATION — BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS LONG-TERM

WHAT IF

What if fiscally sponsored projects could join and fundraise on a platform with their sponsor's EIN? Or fiscal sponsors could add sponsored organizations to the platform?

HIGHLIGHT

Benevity allows fiscally sponsored organizations to be added as a Project on a fiscal sponsor organization's page and enables them to appear in search results and receive donations.

What if platforms provided more context to donors around how fiscally sponsored organizations can still receive tax deductible donations, and that all money received goes to the sponsored org, not to the sponsor?

What if 501c4's and PACs could fundraise on the platform, given everyday donors are less incentivized by tax deductible donations?

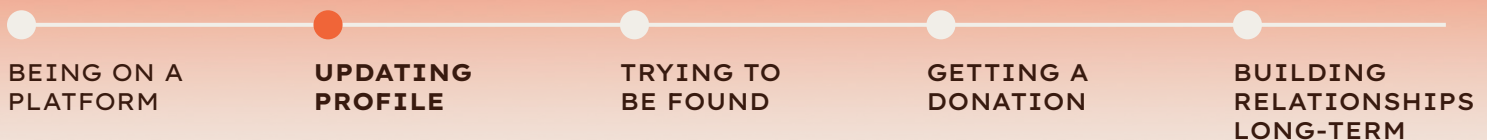**WHAT'S IN IT FOR PLATFORMS**

Enabling donations to over 18,000 fiscally sponsored organizations would mean more people are donating to more organizations via platforms. People would have access to many more local, proximate groups.

Storytelling

DISCUSSION QUESTION

What could platforms unlock by enabling more multimedia storytelling and crowdsourcing content—beyond ratings and mission statements?

BEING ON A PLATFORM · **UPDATING PROFILE** · TRYING TO BE FOUND · GETTING A DONATION · BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS LONG-TERM

WHAT IF

What if organizational profiles expanded to make it easier for organizations to tell their stories—for example, by enabling video forms, integrating social media posts, or integrating impact reports?

What if platforms prompted and weighted community endorsements at least as much as financials in ratings to build trust?

"We always focus on donors. But what we're doing is incredible. Why aren't we focused on us, right? I think the paradigm has to change. I think when we focus on stories rather than the money, everything would change."

–ANONYMOUS C3 NON-PROFIT LEADER

"Tech platforms are using very *old* ideas about impact. They focus on outputs like counting water bottles distributed, but direct service work and movement work are different. This tarnishes the power of movements. There needs to be a more thoughtful, current impact analysis."

–ANONYMOUS INFRASTRUCTURE ORG
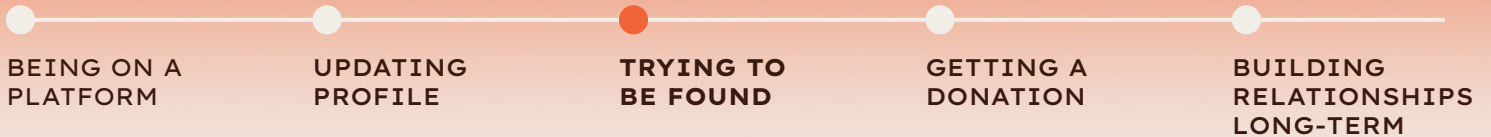
WHAT'S IN IT FOR PLATFORMS

Video storytelling could be more engaging for donors and organizations alike. Social video generates 1200% more shares than text and image content combined, and viewers retain 95% of a message when they watch it in a video compared to 10% when reading it in text.[20]

Collaborative Fundraising

DISCUSSION QUESTION

What could platforms unlock by facilitating more donations to coalitions of organizations or entire causes in a local area?

BEING ON A PLATFORM · UPDATING PROFILE · **TRYING TO BE FOUND** · GETTING A DONATION · BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS LONG-TERM

WHAT IF

What if platforms enabled donors to give to time-bound, collaborative fundraisers that split donations amongst multiple organizations working on a common cause?

What if organizations could suggest other organizations they are already in coalition with for their donors to also give to?

What if platforms connected similar organizations with each other—via meetups or events—to promote knowledge sharing and coalition building?

"Even when we were getting loads of money in, we were donating money to a Latinx sex working group in Queens, a sex worker organization in Korea. We gave $10,000 to another group in Taiwan. For donors, how can we be like, 'These are all the people that we are in coalition with. How can these dollars go to everybody?'"

—YIN Q,
CORE MEMBER, RED CANARY SONG & KINK OUT

HIGHLIGHTS

Black Feminist Future organized a collaborative fundraiser on ActBlue for 13 other local Black reproductive justice organizations, that is still receive donations passively to this day. Also, Charity Navigator's Giving Basket feature enables donors to give to multiple organizations at once.
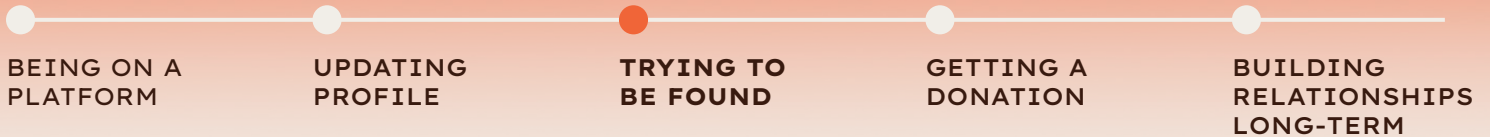
WHAT'S IN IT FOR PLATFORMS

Cause-based or collaborative fundraising alleviates choice paralysis for donors to find the "perfect organization" to donate to. In one study, participants who were offered a donate-to-all option were 9% more likely to give than those who had to select a single charity.[15]

Curation

DISCUSSION QUESTION

What could platforms unlock by elevating and amplifying proximate organizations who are mostly invisible on these platforms?

BEING ON A PLATFORM — UPDATING PROFILE — **TRYING TO BE FOUND** — GETTING A DONATION — BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS LONG-TERM

WHAT IF

What if platforms celebrated and communicated the work of proximate organizations, beyond a rotating homepage spotlight?

What if platforms leveraged existing "curators" to find and promote other organizations? Intermediaries like giving circles, collaborative funds, community foundations, and fiscal sponsors all have lists of projects and grantees to leverage.

What if platforms showed who peers or people in their network or workplace donated to, to uplift lesser known organizations?

HIGHLIGHTS

GoFundMe's Invest in Black Joy spotlight centers Black-organized fundraisers on its homepage.

Every.org leverages community testimonials and peer influence to increase awareness of various organizations, showcasing organizations that people in your network donate to.

JustFund brings donor networks onto the platform (e.g., Donors of Color Network), where people get push notifications if a peer in their network funds an organization.
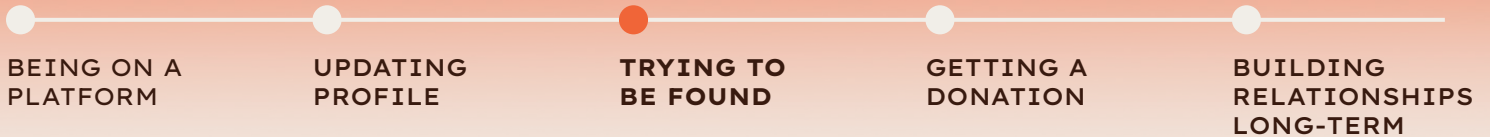
WHAT'S IN IT FOR PLATFORMS

Younger Americans are more likely to give to racial and social justice, as are African American and Asian American donors.[3] Given future demographic trends in the US, platforms have an opportunity to meet increasing donor demand and channel more funding toward social and racial justice causes.

Matchmaking

DISCUSSION QUESTION

What could platforms unlock by matchmaking values-aligned donors with proximate organizations working on issues they care about?

BEING ON A PLATFORM — UPDATING PROFILE — **TRYING TO BE FOUND** — GETTING A DONATION — BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS LONG-TERM

WHAT IF

What if platforms leveraged their knowledge of individuals' values and preferences to surface to them proximate organizations they would be interested in?

"If we did have more platforms that were geared towards the everyday donors who make it a priority to donate, that would be beneficial. Smaller nonprofits would be able to expand."
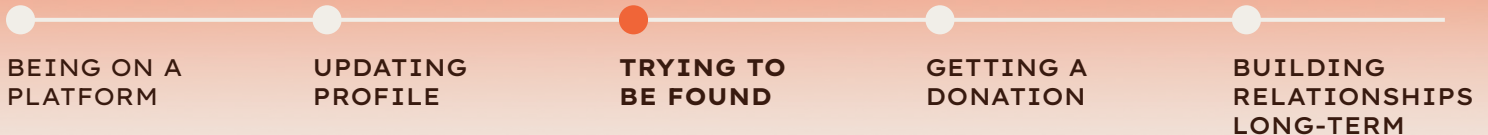
— RAVEN WILKERSON, FOUNDER, OUT OF BOUNDS SUPPORT

"There would have to be some kind of mutual agreement, that the people that are part of this platform are also seeking authentic friendships to change the world. And money might be involved or it may not be."

—RUDY ESPINOZA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, INCLUSIVE ACTION FOR THE CITY

WHAT'S IN IT FOR PLATFORMS

A strong recommendation leads to greater engagement on the platform and potentially recurring donations. Younger generations want easier ways to identify organizations working in their communities, including those led by people who share their identities - traits like gender, race, or political affiliation.[21]

Data

DISCUSSION QUESTION

What could platforms unlock by providing organizations with the donor data and insights they need to build relationships?

BEING ON A PLATFORM

UPDATING PROFILE

TRYING TO BE FOUND

GETTING A DONATION

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS LONG-TERM

WHAT IF

What if platforms provided not just individual donor information but macro-level trends in donor search terms to aid fundraising strategies?

HIGHLIGHTS

The GivingTuesday Data Commons works with more than 800 contributing partners to understand the drivers and impacts of generosity. Its Working Groups provide an opportunity for giving platforms, researchers, academics, data scientists, and practitioners to collaborate and generate actionable donor insights.

"It's also very hard to navigate these platforms and understand what employees really want to know more about us so they can support our cause. We posted regularly volunteer positions on [a platform], hoping that we can get people who can volunteer for us. But we have yet to have anybody reach out to us."

—CYNTHIA YONGVANG, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, UNITED HMONG WITH DISABILITIES

WHAT'S IN IT FOR PLATFORMS

With donor data and insights, non-profits would be more incentivized to use a platform for reaching new audiences.

Capacity

DISCUSSION QUESTION

What could platforms unlock by extending the momentum of crisis funding?

BEING ON A PLATFORM

UPDATING PROFILE

TRYING TO BE FOUND

GETTING A DONATION

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS LONG-TERM

WHAT IF

What if platforms made recurring giving the default option in crises?

What if platforms did more to educate donors on the importance of maintaining giving long after a crisis has subsided?

What if platforms helped provide options for giving to values-adjacent organizations when a "big name" is flush with funds?

"For BEAM, our challenge during the pandemic, when we had a great influx of new donors, is how do you get people to be interested in you when the fire's over?"
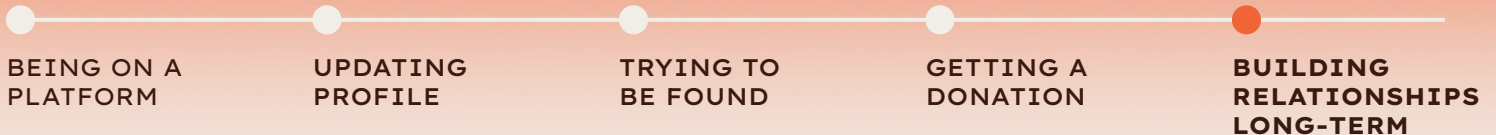
–LORI RICHARDS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BEAM

WHAT'S IN IT FOR PLATFORMS

Platforms not only become ways for people to give in a crisis but enable more giving to happen over sustained periods of time.

Relationship Building

What could platforms unlock by enabling more direct and personalized connections between organizations and individuals?

BEING ON A PLATFORM

UPDATING PROFILE

TRYING TO BE FOUND

GETTING A DONATION

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS LONG-TERM

WHAT IF

What if platforms provided organizations with ways to share tailored multimedia stories of impact directly with segments of followers?

What if platforms leaned into principles of collective giving and membership-based communities to foster direct relationships between organizations and their donors?

What if platforms nudged donors to follow organizations they donate to on social media so the donation is a starting point for a longer relationship?

"If they had some sort of product where you can communicate directly via your phone to a donor and text them a video, almost like a person-to-person connection. It would revolutionize giving because people would feel so intimately connected to those students."

—JAIME ZAVALA,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
ARTWORXLA

WHAT'S IN IT FOR PLATFORMS

This ability for community and relationship building would increase engagement and usage, from both donors and organizations—without having multiple organizations vying for people's attention or the diluted messaging of mass communication.

Collaborative Possibilities

These possibilities require collaboration across multiple stakeholders and platforms.

1. COLLABORATIVE COHORTS

What if cohorts made up of both platforms and impacted organizations (e.g., fiscal sponsors or intermediaries) collaborated on briefs arising from this research, such as creating a fiscal sponsorship database?

"[Platforms] could be more connected to organizations like fiscal sponsors or other re-granting organizations that are more familiar with their constituents to be able to give more."

—SOPHIA PARK,
DIRECTOR OF EXTERNAL
RELATIONS, FRACTURED ATLAS

2. COMPREHENSIVE API

What if there was a comprehensive API that made it easier for platforms to include and interface with many types of organizations beyond 501c3s (such as fiscally sponsored projects and c4s)?

What if there was a federated data model that allowed nonprofits to create and manage profiles on multiple giving platforms simultaneously?

HIGHLIGHT

JustFund is a platform that uses a Common Proposal, similar to the "Common Application" for colleges, to make it easy for groups to apply to multiple funding opportunities and easy for grantmakers to find new organizations to fund.

BlankFiller is a Better Giving Studio concept that demonstrates the potential of a federated model for nonprofit data to maximize giving.

3. DECISION-MAKING SUPPORT

What if there was a centralized resource for organizations to determine the best platforms to use based on their giving goals and strategy?

"I don't know if there's a marketplace for nonprofits to learn about all the benefits and features of these different platforms in order to decide what's going to be conducive to our giving strategy. I just want it to be simple."

—PALLAVI KIDAMBI,
GRANTS MANAGER,
HIP HOP FOR CHANGE

A Wealth of Opportunity

There is a wealth of opportunity if giving platforms choose to center the needs of the organizations on the frontlines of social change.

Crises can be prevented. Broken systems can be repaired and remade.

And doing so better serves the donor, because their contributions go further.

Staying "agnostic" and treating all nonprofits equally, reinforces systemic inequities.

The most well-resourced nonprofits have the most time and personnel to manage platform relationships and processes.

For many giving platforms, this means being "neutral" actually biases platforms towards these larger orgs, leaving smaller, often proximate organizations behind.

In reality, many "neutral" platforms have special processes and account managers for the largest organizations, tipping the balances further towards inequity.
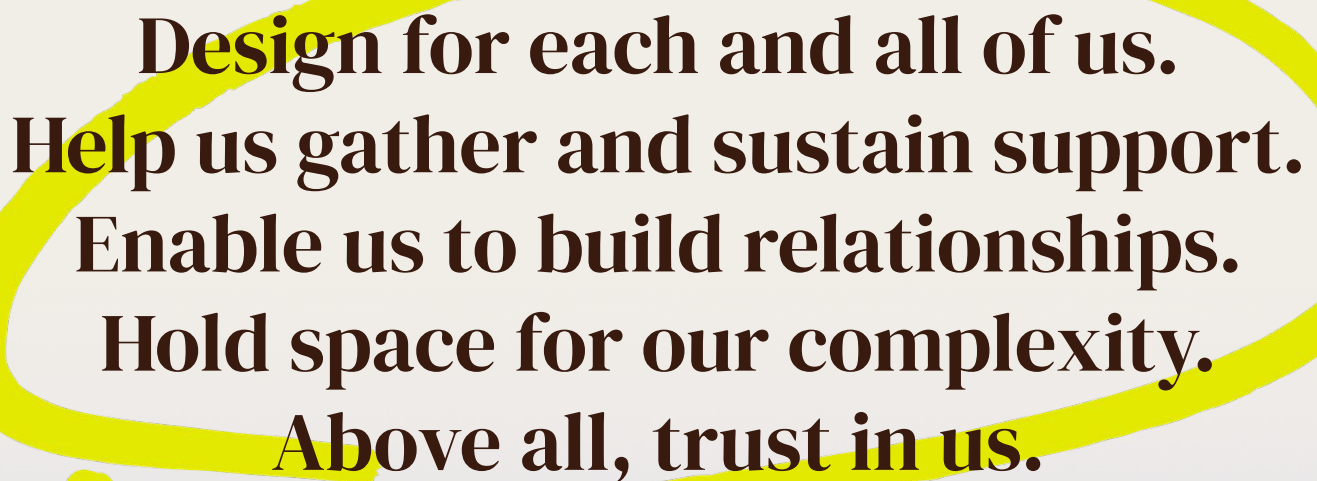
"As a platform, we didn't have an equity stance. But the staffers did. It's a really hard balance. There were heavy debates and conversations. You used to hear about platforms being neutral and now there is no such thing anymore. So how do you provide something that is open but take a stance? Where is that line? There is no such thing as neutral."

— ANONYMOUS GIVING PLATFORM

The Invitation

To giving platforms, in the collective
voice of proximate organizations.

Design for each and all of us.
Help us gather and sustain support.
Enable us to build relationships.
Hold space for our complexity.
Above all, trust in us.

Take the Next Step

It's time to listen.
Time to shift.
Time to act.

Opportunity for Continued Learning & Action:
If you're a giving platform interested in building tools to better serve proximate, community-led organizations, you may be interested in the Giving Platform Collaborative - Equity Working Group.

To get connected, sign up by completing this survey and mark your interest in "How to better incorporate equity as a platform principle."

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