

Catalogue no. 89-652-X2015008
ISBN 978-0-660-03834-6

Spotlight on Canadians: Results from the General Social Survey

Charitable giving by individuals

by Martin Turcotte

Release date: December 16, 2015



Statistics
Canada

Statistique
Canada

Canada

How to obtain more information

For information about this product or the wide range of services and data available from Statistics Canada, visit our website, www.statcan.gc.ca.

You can also contact us by

email at STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca

telephone, from Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., at the following toll-free numbers:

- Statistical Information Service 1-800-263-1136
- National telecommunications device for the hearing impaired 1-800-363-7629
- Fax line 1-877-287-4369

Depository Services Program

- Inquiries line 1-800-635-7943
- Fax line 1-800-565-7757

Standards of service to the public

Statistics Canada is committed to serving its clients in a prompt, reliable and courteous manner. To this end, Statistics Canada has developed standards of service that its employees observe. To obtain a copy of these service standards, please contact Statistics Canada toll-free at 1-800-263-1136. The service standards are also published on www.statcan.gc.ca under “Contact us” > “Standards of service to the public.”

Note of appreciation

Canada owes the success of its statistical system to a long-standing partnership between Statistics Canada, the citizens of Canada, its businesses, governments and other institutions. Accurate and timely statistical information could not be produced without their continued co-operation and goodwill.

Standard table symbols

The following symbols are used in Statistics Canada publications:

- . not available for any reference period
- .. not available for a specific reference period
- ... not applicable
- 0 true zero or a value rounded to zero
- 0^s value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded
- ^P preliminary
- ^r revised
- X suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*
- ^E use with caution
- F too unreliable to be published
- * significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

Published by authority of the Minister responsible for Statistics Canada

© Minister of Industry, 2015

All rights reserved. Use of this publication is governed by the Statistics Canada [Open Licence Agreement](#).

An HTML version is also available.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français.

Highlights

- In 2013, 82% of Canadians 15 years and older made donations to a charitable or non-profit organization. The proportion in 2004 was 85%.
- From 2004 to 2013, the total amount of donations made to charitable and non-profit organizations rose from \$10.4 billion to \$12.8 billion, an increase of 23%.
- Between 2004 and 2013, the total amount of donations tended to increase more in the provinces west of Ontario, namely in Alberta (+100%), Saskatchewan (+54%), Manitoba (+48%) and British Columbia (+47%). In Quebec, the total amount of donations rose 35% between 2004 and 2013.
- In 2013, 66% of the total donations made by individuals were from primary donors, defined as the 10% of individuals who gave the most money during the year.
- Between 2004 and 2013, the total amount of donations made by primary donors increased \$2.0 billion. By comparison, other donors gave \$430 million more in 2013 than in 2004.
- The three types of organizations to which donors gave the biggest amounts were religious organizations (41% of all donations), health organizations (13%) and social services organizations (12%).
- Women were more likely than men to donate money (84% and 80% respectively), food (66% and 53% respectively) and material goods (82% and 70% respectively).
- Primary donors were more actively involved in their religion. In 2013, 54% of these donors had participated in religious activities at least once a week, compared with 14% of other donors and 8% of non-donors.
- When asked about the reasons for donating, the vast majority (91%) of donors said they felt compassion towards people in need. The other reasons often cited include the idea of helping a cause in which they personally believed (88%) and wanting to make a contribution to their community (82%).
- Just under 30% of donors reported that they did not give more because they did not think the organizations would use their money efficiently or effectively. Donors aged 55 and older (34%) in particular were more likely than donors between 15 and 34 years (23%) to have this impression.

Charitable giving by individuals

by *Martin Turcotte*

The taxes that citizens pay enable government to fulfill their mandates and help fund social programs in health, education, and support for people in need. In turn, many charitable or non-profit organizations receive funding from governments.

However, many people prefer to directly support specific causes or groups, such as community organizations that work with target populations, as well as religious groups, universities and colleges, medical research institutes, advocacy groups and political parties. Donations are a way for people to express their preferences and to give based on their personal interests and values.

This article explores the donations made by individuals to charitable and non-profit organizations in Canada. The first section examines the characteristics of donations and donors. Who donates? How much is donated and are donation amounts on the rise? What types of organizations benefit the most from these donations? What have the trends been since 2004?

The second section focuses on what motivates donors and how they perceive charitable or non-profit organizations in general. Why do people donate? Why do people not give more? To what extent do donors think that the organizations are using the amounts they receive effectively?

While this article presents results for all donors, it will focus on “primary donors,” defined as the 10% of donors who gave the most money during the year (specifically, donations of \$1,150 or more in 2013).

Primary donors contribute approximately two-thirds of the total amount of donations made during a year. In addition, they are largely responsible for the increase in the total amount of donations made over the past few years. They are, therefore, a population of interest for charitable or non-profit organizations.

The data are taken from the 2013 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating and the 2004 Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating. Note that corporate donations, which represent billions of dollars, are not included in this analysis.

Section 1: Donation trends and donor characteristics

The increase in donations is attributable to the contributions of primary donors

A large majority of Canadians make monetary donations to charitable or non-profit organizations. In 2013, just over 24 million Canadians aged 15 years and older, or 82% of the population, had made a monetary donation. This proportion was down from 2004 (85%).

However, the amounts that individuals donated increased. Between 2004 and 2013, the total amount given by donors to charitable or non-profit organizations rose 23% to \$12.8 billion¹ (Table 1).

The reasons behind this increase are two-fold: population growth and an increase in the average donations made. In 2013, the average annual amount per donor was \$531, compared with \$469 in 2004.

Every donation is important. However, donations made by primary donors, or the 10% of individuals who gave the most money during a given year, are especially important for the philanthropy sector.

1. All amounts are expressed in 2013 constant dollars.

The role played by primary donors was even greater, since they were responsible for most of the increase in the total donations made in the past decade. From 2004 to 2013, the total donations made by primary donors rose 30% from \$6.4 billion to \$8.4 billion. By comparison, the contribution of other donors increased 11% from \$3.9 billion to \$4.4 billion.

Based on these trends, 66% of the total amount of donations made in 2013 came from primary donors, compared with 62% in 2004.

Primary donors in Alberta give more and more

Over the past 10 years, donations tended to increase more in the provinces west of Ontario. Alberta was well ahead of the other provinces showing the biggest increase in donations between 2004 and 2013 (from \$1.2 billion to \$2.4 billion, or a 100% increase). This increase was also quite considerable in Saskatchewan (+54%), Manitoba (+48%) and British Columbia (+47%).

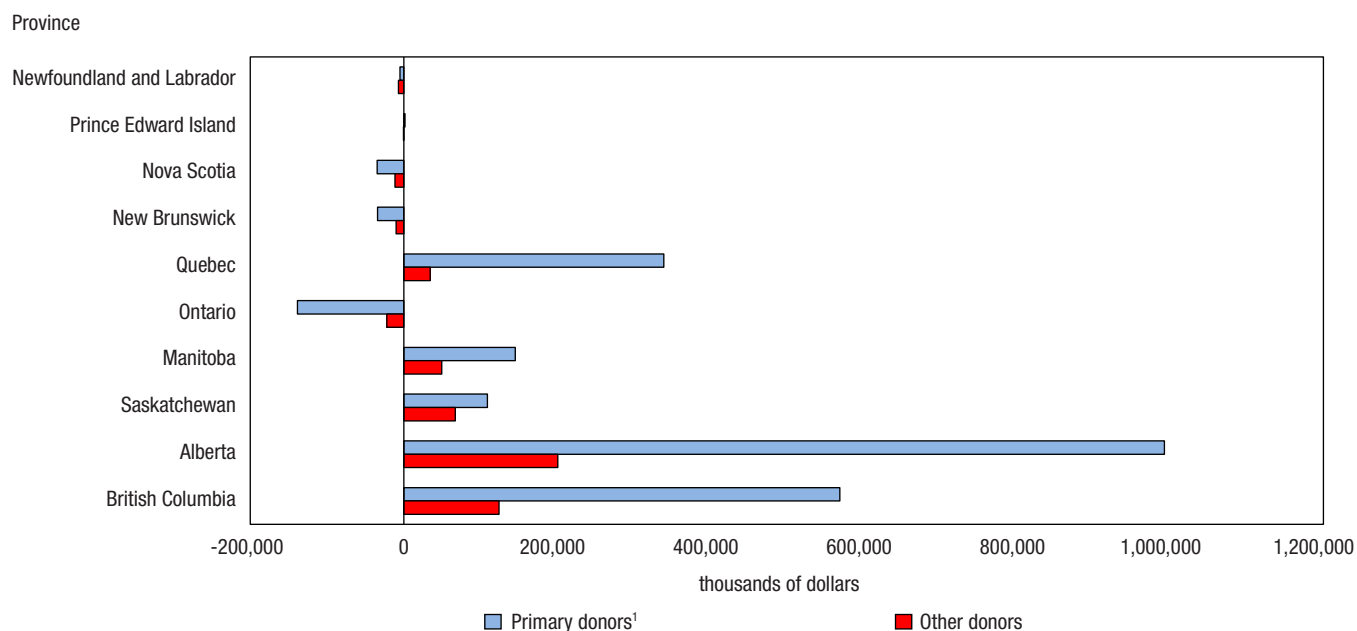
Quebec also posted an increase in the total amount of donations, from \$1.1 billion in 2004 to \$1.4 billion in 2013 (+35%).

By comparison, the total amount of donations made in Ontario was unchanged during the period,² and decreased in New Brunswick.

In many provinces, the increase in the total amount of donations was in large part attributable to primary donors.

Specifically, in Alberta, the contribution made by primary donors increased almost by \$1.0 billion between 2004 and 2013, compared with an increase of \$200 million for other donors (Chart 1).

Chart 1
Variation between 2004 and 2013 of the total amount donated to charitable or non-profit organizations, by province



1. Primary donors are defined as the 10% of individuals who gave the most money during the year.

Note: The amounts are expressed in 2013 constant dollars.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2013 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating; 2004 Canada Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating.

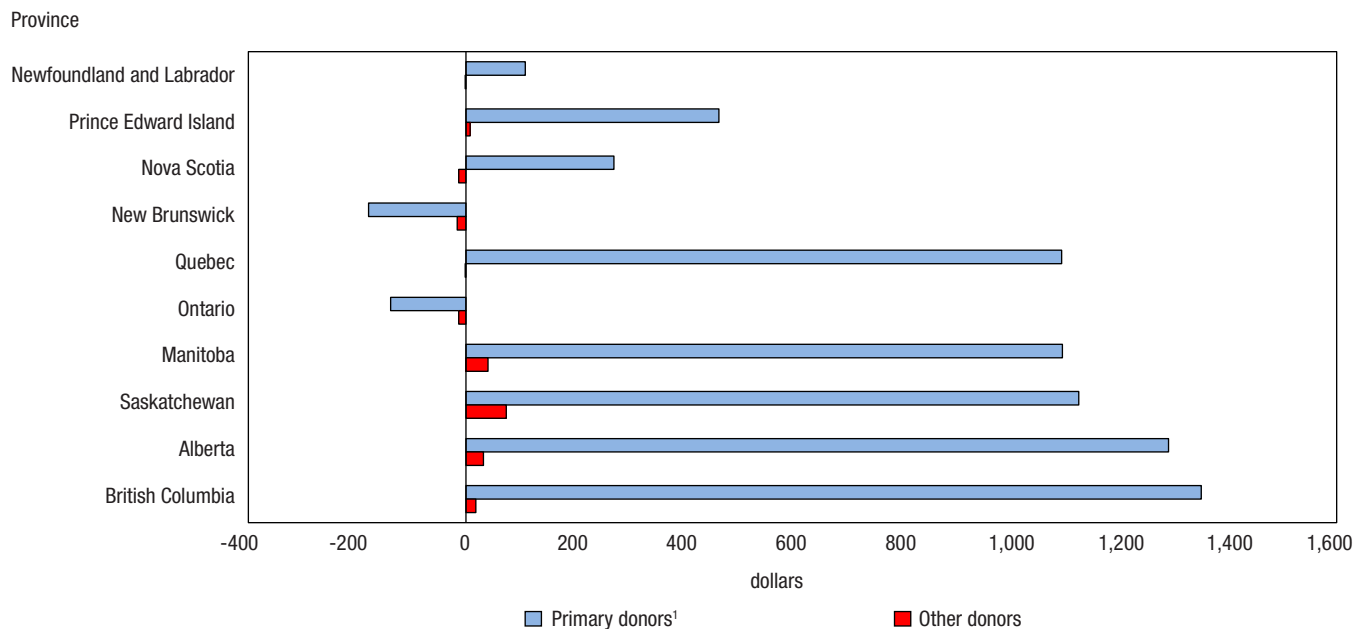
Quebec's primary donors contributed \$339 million more than in 2004, compared with \$35 million more for other donors (Chart 1).

2. The 3% decline was not statistically significant.

However, the primary donors in Ontario were less generous than in the past. Between 2004 and 2013, the total amount of donations in that province fell \$138 million.

The trends in the evolution of average donations made by primary and other donors were even more pronounced. For example, between 2004 and 2013, the annual average donations made by primary donors in Quebec rose \$1,095 (from \$2,196 in 2004 to \$3,291 in 2013) (Chart 2).

Chart 2
Variation between 2004 and 2013 of the average annual amount donated to charitable or non-profit organizations, by province



1. Primary donors are defined as the 10% of individuals who gave the most money during the year.

Note: The amounts are expressed in 2013 constant dollars.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2013 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating; 2004 Canada Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating.

In British Columbia, primary donors gave, on average, \$1,351 more than a decade earlier (\$4,256 in 2013 compared with \$2,905 in 2004).

Primary donors are older on average

The characteristics of Canadians who are most likely to make a monetary donation to charitable or non-profit organizations are fairly well known. They are women, individuals 35 years and older, those with a higher education and income, and who are religiously active.

For example, in 2013, 84% of women had made at least one monetary donation to a charitable or non-profit organization, compared with 80% of men. Furthermore, 91% of individuals who were more religiously active were donors, compared with 81% of those who participated less often or not at all in religious activities.

Who are the primary donors and what are their personal characteristics? This is important to understand since not all donors have the motivation or sufficient financial resources to donate \$1,150 or more to charitable or non-profit organizations.

Not surprisingly, primary donors often have higher income. In 2013, 30% of primary donors lived in a household in the highest income quintile, compared with 20% of other donors and 14% of non-donors. The highest quintile includes individuals in a household whose total annual income was \$144,000 or more (Table 2).

The portrait for personal income quintiles was similar: 36% of primary donors were in the highest income quintile, compared with 10% of non-donors.

However, the amount given by donors in the highest income quintile represent a smaller proportion of their annual income compared to the amount donated by individuals in lower income quintiles (see the box “Relative importance of donations by income level”).

Additionally, primary donors were on average older. In 2013, more than half of primary donors were 55 years of age and older (51%), compared with 34% of other donors and 26% of non-donors (i.e., Canadians who had not made a monetary donation during the year) (Table 2). Although individuals 55 years and older do not always have higher income, they are often mortgage-free and have no dependents, which may enable them to make bigger donations.

Men were overrepresented among primary donors (53%); however, this gender-based difference can be attributed to the fact that men had higher income. For example, among donors whose personal income was in the highest quintile, women were as likely as men to be a primary donor (approximately 16%). The situation was the same in the lower income categories. Furthermore, at an equal level of income, both men and women were as likely to be a primary donor.

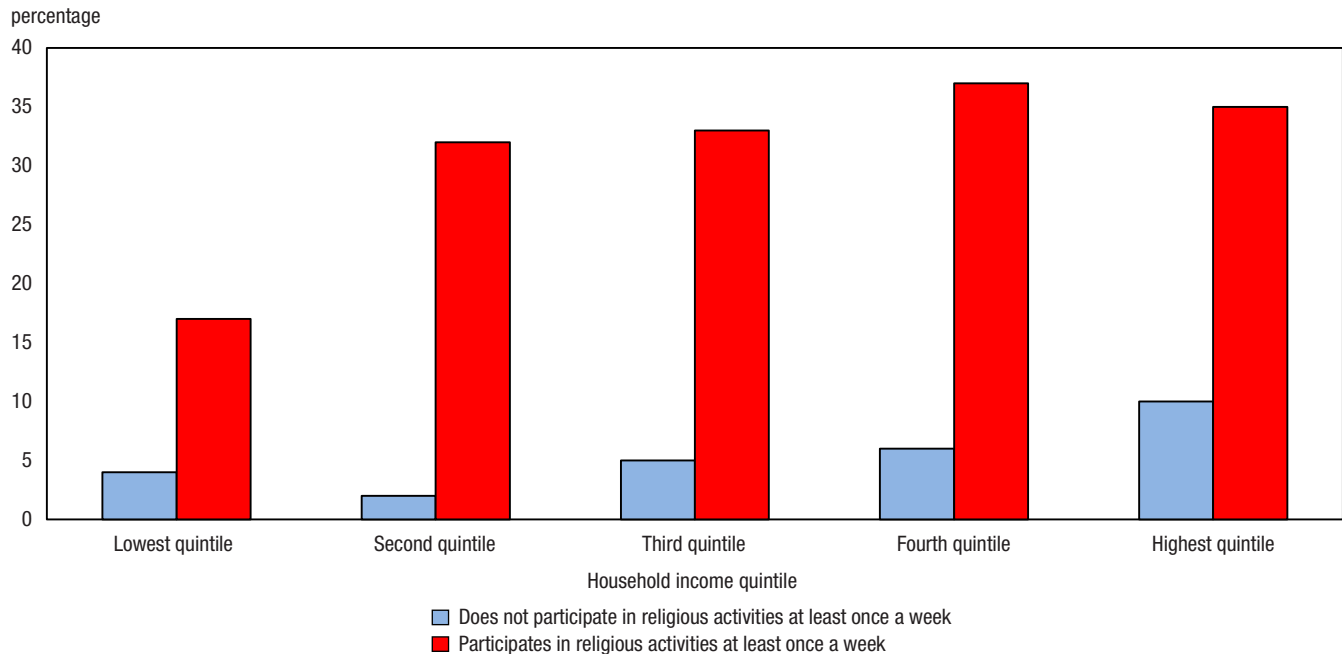
However, what set primary donors apart from the other donors and non-donors—aside from their level of income and other personal characteristics—was how frequently they participated in religious activities. In 2013, 54% of primary donors had participated in religious activities at least once a week, compared with 14% of other donors and 8% of non-donors.

Put differently, donors who participated in religious activities at least once a week had donated \$1,292 on average, compared with \$365 for other types of donors.

Chart 3 illustrates the difference between primary donors who are religiously active and those who are not, regardless of their income level.

In 2013, among individuals with the lowest income, 17% of those who were religiously active were primary donors (in other words, they had made a donation of \$1,150 or more). Among individuals with the highest household income, but who participated less often or not at all in religious activities, only 10% were in the primary donor group (Chart 3).

Chart 3
Percentage of primary donors¹ among all donors, by household income quintile and frequency of participation in religious activities, 2013



1. Primary donors are defined as the 10% of individuals who gave the most money during the year.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2013 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating.

A multivariate analysis of the factors associated with the probability for donors to be in the primary donor group supported the finding on the frequency of participation in religious activities.

When age, sex, education level and household income are held constant, the predicted probability of being in the primary donor group was 0.26 among persons who participate in religious activities at least once a week, but 0.06 among individuals who participated less often or not at all (a difference, or marginal effect, of 20 percentage points).

By comparison, the difference between individuals whose household was in the lowest income quintile and those whose household was in the highest quintile was roughly three times less at 7 percentage points (respective predicted probabilities of 0.07 and 0.14 of belonging to the primary donor group, with all factors held constant).

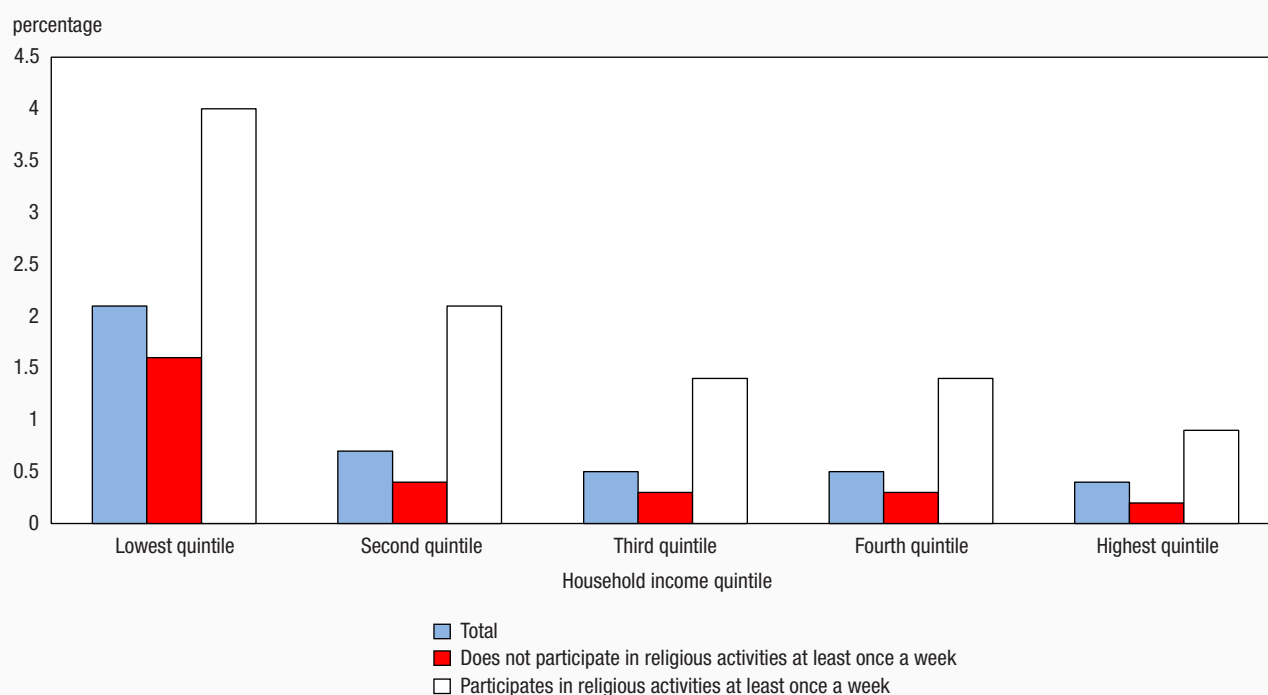
Relative importance of donations by income level

The amounts that donors give annually to charitable organizations represent a variable proportion of their annual household income. Generally speaking, donors whose household is in the highest income quintile tend to give a smaller proportion of their income to charitable and non-profit organizations, even though their donations are on average higher.

In 2013 in particular, donors whose household was in the highest income quintile had, on average, donated 0.4% of the value of their total household income. In contrast, this proportion was 2.1% among donors whose household was in the lowest income quintile (i.e., an annual income of \$43,200 or less).¹

Chart A.1

Amount of donations as a proportion of annual household income, by household income quintile and frequency of participation in religious activities, 2013



Source: Statistics Canada, 2013 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating.

Participation in religious activities had a significant effect on these averages. For example, among donors whose household is in the lowest income quintile, those who participated in religious activities every week donated 4% of their income on average. In comparison, those in the same income quintile who did not participate as often in religious activities or who did not attend religious services at all donated 1.6% of their annual income on average (Chart A.1). Similar differences for all household income categories were observed.

It should be noted that people with a lower annual income may have considerable assets that they could use to make donations. However, the GSS on Giving, Volunteering and Participating does not collect information on respondents' assets.

1. The calculation of these percentages did not include individuals with a negative household income.

What kinds of organizations do Canadians donate to?

Certain causes and types of organizations are more popular than others with donors. As a result, there are considerable disparities in the amounts collected by the different types of organizations. The GSS on Giving, Volunteering and Participating collects information on the types of organizations to which Canadians made a donation during the year, and on the total amounts donated to these organizations.

In 2013, the three types of organizations to which Canadians were most likely to have donated money were health organizations (48% of respondents had made at least one donation to such an organization), social services organizations (40%) and religious organizations (31%) (Table 3).

The types of organizations that Canadians were least likely to donate to included universities and colleges (2%), community development and housing organizations (2%), arts and culture organizations (3%), and organizations that promote human and other rights or advocate for social and political interests (3%).

As in previous years, the biggest donations made went to religious organizations, i.e., those that promote religious beliefs and provide religious services and rituals.

More specifically, religious organizations received \$5.2 billion in donations in 2013. This represents 41% of the total donations made by Canadians during the year (Table 3).

This was followed by health organizations (\$1.7 billion, or 13% of total donations) and social services organizations (\$1.6 billion, or 12% of all donations).

International organizations (\$1.3 billion) and grant-making, fundraising and volunteer work promotion organizations (\$690 million) took the fourth and fifth spots.

The types of organizations that received less than \$200 million per year in donations include those in arts and culture, sports and recreation, community development and housing (community organizations) and organizations and groups that protect and promote human and other rights.

Compared with 2004, the amounts donated to certain types of organizations rose more than the average. In particular, in 2013, individuals donated \$860 million more to international organizations than in 2004, an increase of 203% (in 2013 constant dollars).

During the same period, donations rose by 86% for community development and housing organizations, 49% for social services organizations, and 14% for health organizations.

The organizations that received less in donations in 2013 than in 2004 were in the sports and recreation sector. Compared with 2004, these organizations saw a 22% decrease in total donations. The total donation amounts for the other types of organizations were not different in 2013 than they were in 2004 (differences not statistically significant).

More than 80% of donations to universities and colleges made by primary donors

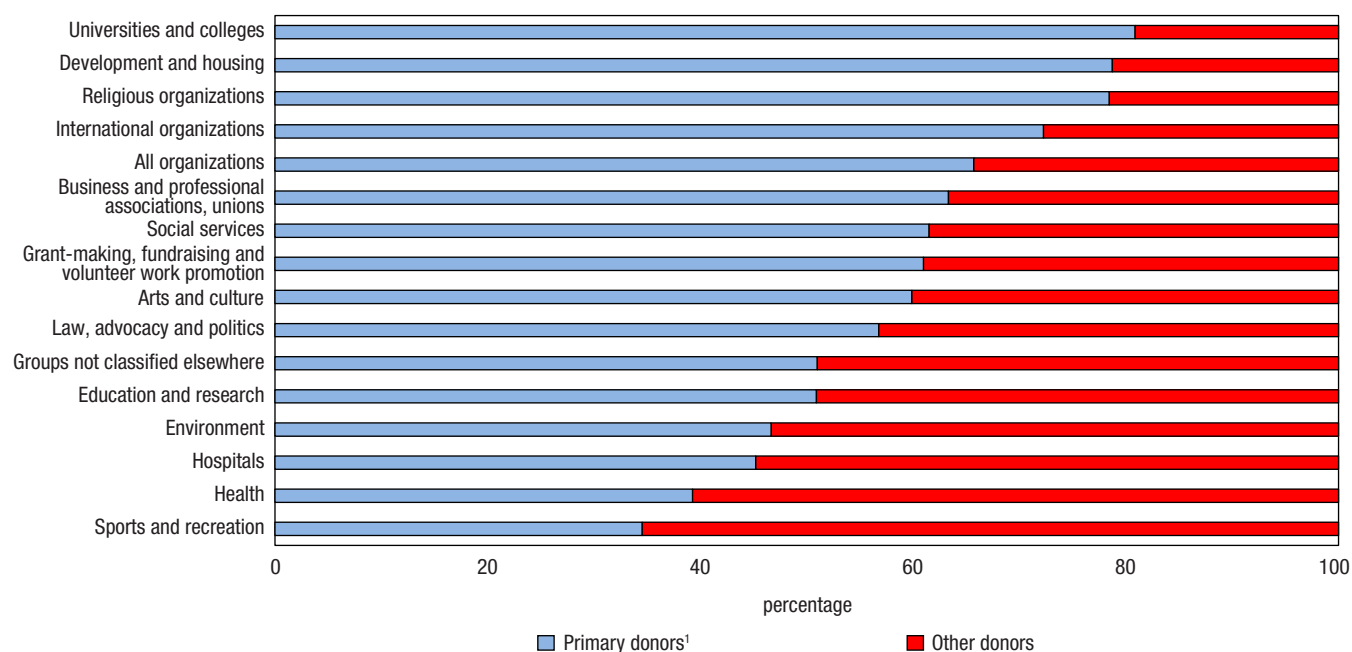
In 2013, the cumulative amount of donations made by primary donors represented 66% of the total amount donated to charitable and non-profit organizations. However, this proportion varied by type of organization. For certain types, such as universities and colleges, and community development and housing organizations, the relative importance of primary donors was even greater.

In particular, in 2013, 81% of donations from individuals to universities and colleges and 79% of donations from individuals to community development and housing organizations were made by primary donors (Chart 4).

Chart 4

Percentage of the total amount of donations made by primary and other donors, by type of organization, 2013

Type of organization



1. Primary donors are defined as the 10% of individuals who gave the most money during the year.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2013 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating.

Primary donors were also the ones who donated the most to religious organizations. In 2013, 78% of all donations made to religious organizations were made by primary donors (Chart 4). As a dollar amount, primary donors gave \$4.1 billion to religious organizations.

Other types of organizations depended much less on contributions from primary donors for their funding. For example, only 35% of the total amount of donations to sports and recreation organizations came from primary donors.

The other type of organization that differed from the general trend was health organizations. In 2013, primary donors gave \$651 million to health organizations, while other donors together gave \$1.0 billion. That being said, their contribution was greater than their relative weight (donations of primary donors to health organizations represented about 40% of all donations).

Donating goods or food

In addition to monetary donations, many Canadians donate goods (clothing, toys or household goods) or food. However, the proportions of donors who made goods or food donations was lower in 2013 than in 2004.

Specifically, 60% of Canadians in 2013 had donated food to charitable organizations such as a food bank, compared with 63% in 2004.

Also in 2013, 76% of Canadians donated clothing, toys or household items or products to charitable and non-profit organizations, compared with 79% in 2004.

Women (66%) were more likely than men (53%) to donate food. They were also more likely (82%) than men (70%) to donate material goods (Table A.1).

These differences were especially pronounced among individuals under the age of 55. For example, in the 15-to-34 age group, 59% of women had donated food, compared with 45% of men, and 79% of women had donated material goods, compared with 59% of men.

Section 2: Donor habits, reasons for donating and perceptions

Roughly \$4 billion was collected at a church, synagogue, mosque or other place of worship

Charitable and non-profit organizations use various approaches to solicit individuals and appeal to their generosity, including mailing letters, collecting in a place of worship, and canvassing by telephone, online or door to door. Furthermore, donors can give on their own, for example, through in memoriam donations. How do Canadians give and is there a difference between primary donors and other donors in the way they give?

In 2013, the five most common ways for individuals to donate were in response to being canvassed in a shopping centre or on the street (34%), collection at a church, synagogue, mosque or other place of worship (also 34%), by sponsoring someone (28%), by mail (27%) and on their own (23%) (Table 4).

However, the most common ways to donate were not necessarily the ways through which organizations could collect the biggest amounts.

For example, in 2013, approximately one-third of donors had given after being canvassed in a shopping centre or on the street. However, only 1.4% of all donations made during the year, or \$175 million, were collected through this method.

In addition, while roughly 1 in 4 donors had given after being canvassed at home (24%), only 1.7% of all donations in 2013 were collected through this method.

By comparison, 32% of all donations in Canada in 2013, or just over \$4.0 billion, were collected at a church, synagogue, mosque or other place of worship.

Primary donors not only gave higher amounts, but also made more donations and donated to a wider range of organizations. As a result, it is not surprising that primary donors were more likely to have donated through practically every solicitation mode possible.³

3. The exception is canvassing in a shopping centre or on the street. In 2013, 29% of primary donors had given through this method, compared with 35% of other donors.

For example, 48% of primary donors had given after being canvassed by mail, compared with 25% of other donors.

Because they participate more frequently in religious activities, 67% of primary donors had given during collection at a church, synagogue, mosque or other place of worship. By comparison, 30% of other donors had given through this approach.

The most common payment method was cash

The 2013 GSS on Giving, Volunteering and Participating provides information on the payment method used for most donations made by Canadians.

In 2013, the majority of donors made a cash donation, and the largest sums had been collected in cash. Of the 10 billion donations for which the payment method can be determined, 6.5 billion (or 65%) were cash donations.⁴

The second most common payment method for donations was credit card. In 2013, \$1.8 billion, or 18% of donations for which the payment method can be determined, were made through a credit card. However, part of these donations did not go to the charitable and non-profit organizations, since credit card companies and online payment services generally ask recipients for approximately 1.5% to 3% of the amount of all financial transactions.

The other payment methods were less popular. For example, \$836 million were collected through pre-authorized account deductions (8%) and \$340 million through payroll deductions (3.4%).

Donor habits

In an effort to plan their fundraising campaigns, charitable and non-profit organizations may want to have a better understanding of donor habits—in other words, knowing whether donors decide in advance on the total annual amount they will donate, including the largest amounts.

The amounts that most donors give to charitable and non-profit organizations represent a relatively small share of their annual expenses. Therefore, it is not surprising that only a minority (14%) of donors decide in advance on the amount they will donate in a year (Table 5).

Even for the biggest donations, the majority of donors did not decide in advance which organizations they would donate to: 28% said that they decided in advance, but 61% reported deciding when they were canvassed, and 11% said they did both.

Finally, a majority of donors changed the organizations they donated to from one year to the next. Roughly one-third of donors reported always donating to the same organizations (32%), 28% donated to different organizations, and 40% did both. Primary donors were more likely than the other donors to always give to the same organizations (41%).

Primary donors are more likely to plan on claiming a tax credit

Taxpayers can receive a tax credit for the donations they make. In some cases, they can get a reduction on the amount of income tax they have to pay. This reduction equals approximately half the value of the donation made to a registered charity.

In 2013, 48% of donors reported that they planned on claiming a tax credit for the donations they made in the previous 12 months (Table 6).

4. The payment method was not collected for donations of \$5 or less, and information is not available for donation amounts that were imputed. As a result, the total donations collected by payment method is lower than the total of all amounts donated (\$12.8 billion).

The donation amount had a large influence on the probability of planning to claim a tax credit. For example, in 2013, only one-quarter of donors who gave less than \$100 planned on claiming a tax credit (25%), compared with 78% of donors who had given \$500 or more in the previous 12 months.

Women, donors 55 years of age and older, primary donors and residents of the Prairie provinces were more likely to plan on claiming a tax credit.

Conversely, Quebec residents were less likely than residents of other regions to claim this credit.

For each sub-group, donors with the highest household income were nevertheless most likely to consider claiming a tax credit. For example, 64% of donors between 35 and 54 years whose household income was in the highest quintile planned on claiming a tax credit. The corresponding proportion of donors in the same age group whose household income was in the bottom two quintiles was 34% (Table 6).

Approximately 9 out of 10 donors give out of compassion for people in need

In the 2013 GSS, respondents were asked about the various reasons for donating to charitable and non-profit organizations, and which reasons were important to them in the previous 12 months. Of the seven reasons given to respondents, the two most common ones were “they felt compassion towards people in need” (91%) and “to help a cause in which they personally believed” (88%) (Table 7).

In contrast, only 26% of donors considered a government tax credit to be an important reason.

Primary donors and other donors had different reasons for donating.

Primary donors who make bigger donations to religious organizations were more likely (62%) than other donors (26%) to state that they donated to fulfill their religious obligations or other beliefs.

Moreover, primary donors (44%) were almost twice as likely as other donors (23%) to report that a government tax credit was an important reason for them to donate.

Men and women differ in the reasons they consider important for making a donation. For example, 72% of women reported that they or someone they knew had been personally affected by the cause the organization supports, compared with 63% of men. However, differences by sex were smaller for the other possible reasons.

Lastly, there were a few differences by age group. For instance, donors aged 55 and older were more likely to consider a government tax credit as an important reason for donating (32% compared with 16% of donors aged 15 to 34 years). This is probably because they tend to donate bigger amounts.

However, social pressure had a bigger impact on donors in the 35-to-54 age group, with 52% reporting that they made a donation because a family member or acquaintance had asked them to. This proportion was 39% for donors 55 years and older.

Reasons for not giving more

Knowing why donors did not give more can help charitable and non-profit organizations rethink or improve their canvassing methods.

In 2013, the most common reason mentioned by Canadian donors for not giving more was being “happy with what they already gave” (73%). Most donors (69%) also reported not being able to afford to give a larger donation (Table 8).

Donors aged 15 to 34 years, who generally have less financial resources, were slightly more likely to report that they could not afford a larger donation (73% versus 66% of donors 55 years and older).

Some young donors may have wanted to donate more, but could not. For example, donors between 15 and 34 years were less likely than those aged 55 years and older to declare being happy with what they already gave (60% and 83% respectively).

Relatively few donors mentioned not knowing which organizations or causes to support as a reason for not giving more.

Specifically, 13% of donors reported not giving more because they did not know where to make a contribution and 12% reported that “it was hard to find a cause worth supporting.”

However, young donors seemed to be less well-informed than older donors on the possibilities for making a donation. For instance, 21% of donors aged 15 to 34 years reported that they had not given more because they did not know where to make a contribution, compared with 8% of donors 55 years and older.

Approximately 30% of donors did not give more because they did not think the money would be used effectively

Charitable and non-profit organizations must gain the trust of potential donors if they want to reach their fundraising objectives. However, they must adequately use the money they receive if they want to maintain that trust. In 2013, some donors stated that one reason they had not given more was that they did not think the money would be used efficiently or effectively (29%) (Table 8).

Men (32%) were more likely than women (26%) to give this reason. Also, more than one in three donors in the 55-and-older age group thought that organizations would not use their donation efficiently or effectively (34%).

Individuals who expressed doubts that organizations would use their donations effectively were asked why they believed this. The most common response among the statements provided was that the organization was unable to explain where or how the donation would be spent (61%).

The second most common reason was that the organization had spent too much money on its fundraising efforts (46%).

In addition to demonstrating that they adequately use the donations they receive, organizations must be tactful when asking citizens to donate to their cause. One reason some donors reported for not giving more was that they did not like the way they had been approached (29%).

These donors were asked what exactly they did not like about how they were approached. Roughly half (45%) said the main reason was the tone used (for example, rude or demanding). However, fewer donors reported that it was the number of requests and multiple requests from one organization that they did not like (23% in both cases).

Among donors who did not like how they were they were approached to make a donation, the reasons mentioned by men and women were fairly similar.

However, the reasons were not the same among donors in the 15-to-34 and 55-and-older age groups. Young donors seemed to be especially sensitive about the tone used to make a request: 57% of those aged 15 to 34 years reported not liking the tone used, compared with 37% of donors 55 years and older.

Older donors were more concerned with the frequency of requests: 26% of donors aged 55 and older said they did not like the number of requests, compared with 18% of donors aged 15 to 34.

Close to half of donors do not search for information on new organizations to which they plan on donating

Many charitable and non-profit organizations have an excellent reputation thanks to their many achievements in their area of action. Without knowing every detail of the organizations' financial statements, donors can trust that their future donations will be used adequately.

This is not always true, however. Some organizations may have more questionable practices or may not manage their donations as well. When potential donors are canvassed by an organization, they do not necessarily have much information on its activities and management. Do donors seek information about these organizations, and if so, how?

In 2013, just over half of donors (53%) reported that they sought information about a charity that they were considering donating to for the first time (Table 9).

Primary donors were more likely (65%) to seek information, probably because the amounts involved were often greater. Donors between 15 and 34 years of age were also more likely to search for information about a charity.

Of donors who looked for information, the most common way was to contact the charity or visit its website (56%). This was followed by asking someone, such as family, friends or colleagues (25%), reading printed material from the charity (12%) and checking the Canada Revenue Agency website (10%).

Primary donors (19%) were more likely than other donors (12%) to read printed material from the charity, and to ask someone they know (30% versus 24% of other donors).

Differences between age groups were also observed. Older donors were more inclined to read printed material from the charity and to ask someone they know, while younger donors were more likely to contact the charity and, probably most often, to consult its website.

It may be difficult to get a complete picture of the charity just by consulting printed material or talking with friends and family. Knowledge of monitoring mechanisms of charitable and non-profit organizations can also help donors make more informed decisions.

However, citizens are fairly unaware of these monitoring mechanisms. In 2013, nearly two out of three donors did not know how to check whether a charitable or non-profit organization is registered. Additionally, only a small proportion of donors know of organizations that monitor how charities use their donations in Canada (18%).

Generally speaking, primary donors seemed to be more familiar with the various mechanisms that exist. As a case in point, 54% know how to check whether a charitable or non-profit organization is registered, versus 34% of other donors. Furthermore, 29% of primary donors are aware of organizations that monitor charitable and non-profit organizations, compared with 17% of other donors.

Conclusion

From 2004 to 2013, the proportion of Canadians who made a monetary donation to a charitable or non-profit organization decreased from 85% to 82%. However, the amount of donations made by individuals rose 23% during this period (from \$10.4 billion to \$12.8 billion). Much of this increase is attributable to primary donors, defined as the 10% of individuals who gave the most money during the year.

On average, primary donors are older than other donors. They are also more often men and are more active religiously. Primary donors are more likely to give to religious organizations and to give these organizations larger donations.

In 2013, the three types of organizations that received the biggest cumulative amounts were religious organizations (41%, or \$5.2 billion), health organizations (13%, or \$1.7 billion) and social services organizations (12%, or \$1.3 billion).

Organizations that received less than \$200 million in cumulative donations included those in sports and recreation, arts and culture, and organizations that protect and promote human and other rights or advocate for social and political interests (3%).

The most common reasons why donors made a donation included “compassion towards people in need” and the idea of “helping a cause in which they personally believed.” The government tax credit was the least common reason for donating.

The main reasons why donors did not give more included that they were happy with what they already gave and they could not afford to give a larger donation. A small proportion reported that it was hard to find a cause worth supporting.

Data from the 2013 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating revealed that primary donors were responsible for most of the increase in total donations made by individuals. They also indicated, from a regional perspective, that the amounts donated increased more in the provinces west of Ontario. In the coming years and when new data become available, it will be worthwhile to explore whether these trends continue.

Data sources

This article uses data from the 2013 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, and from the 2004, 2007 and 2010 Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating. The target population consisted of persons 15 years and older living in Canada’s 10 provinces, excluding people living full-time in institutions.

For this article, all monetary donations reported by individuals were included, regardless of whether the donation resulted in a tax credit.

For more information on the data sources, please see the following documents:

[Canada Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating \(CSGVP\) – 2004](#)

[Canada Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating \(CSGVP\) – 2007](#)

[Canada Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating \(CSGVP\) – 2010](#)

[General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating \(GSS GVP\) – 2013](#)

Table 1
Total amount of donations, by donor category and province of residence, 2004 and 2013

	Total		Primary donors ¹		Other donors	
	2004	2013	2004	2013	2004	2013
	millions					
Canada	10,392	12,764 [†]	6,445	8,390 [†]	3,947	4,374 [†]
Newfoundland and Labrador	143	132	67	62 ^E	77	70
Prince Edward Island	49	50	28	30	21	21
Nova Scotia	311	265	175	140	136	124
New Brunswick	225	181 [†]	128	94	97	87
Quebec	1,070	1,444 [†]	394 ^E	733 ^{†E}	677	711
Ontario	5,180	5,020	3,370	3,231	1,811	1,789
Manitoba	410	606 [†]	267	412 ^E	144	194 [†]
Saskatchewan	329	506 [†]	213	323 ^E	116	183 [†]
Alberta	1,198	2,391 [†]	807	1,799 [†]	391	592 [†]
British Columbia	1,475	2,168 [†]	997	1,565 [†]	479	603 [†]

^E use with caution

[†] significantly different from 2004 ($p < 0.05$)

1. Primary donors are defined as the 10% of individuals who gave the most money during the year.

Note: The amounts are expressed in 2013 constant dollars.

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2013 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating; 2004 Canada Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating.

Table 2
Personal characteristics of primary donors, other donors and non-donors, 2013

	Primary donors ¹	Other donors	Non-donors
	percentage		
Total	100	100	100
Men	53	48 [†]	55
Women	47	52 [†]	45
Age group			
15 to 34 years	15 [†]	31 [†]	47
35 to 54 years	34 [†]	36 [†]	27
55 years and older	51 [†]	34 [†]	26
Level of education (individuals 25 years and older)			
Less than a high school diploma	5 ^{†E}	9 [†]	20
High school diploma	19 [†]	27	30
Postsecondary diploma or certificate	29	36 [†]	27
University degree	46 [†]	28 [†]	22
Household income quintile			
Lowest quintile	13 [†]	19 [†]	29
Second quintile	16 [†]	20	22
Third quintile	18	20	19
Fourth quintile	22 [†]	20 [†]	17
Highest quintile	30 [†]	20 [†]	14
Personal income quintile			
Lowest quintile	8 [†]	19 [†]	32
Second quintile	14 [†]	19 [†]	27
Third quintile	19	21 [†]	17
Fourth quintile	22 [†]	21 [†]	15
Highest quintile	36 [†]	21 [†]	10
Participation in religious activities			
Does not participate in religious activities at least once a week	46 [†]	86 [†]	92
Participates in religious activities at least once a week	54 [†]	14 [†]	8

^E use with caution

[†] significantly different from non-donors ($p < 0.05$)

1. Primary donors are defined as the 10% of individuals who gave the most money during the year.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2013 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating.

Table 3
Donor rate and amounts donated to different types of organizations, 2013

Type of organization	Donor rate	Total amount donated	Percentage of donations (breakdown)
	percentage	millions of dollars	percentage
Total	82	12,764	100
Arts and culture	3	160	1.3
Sports and recreation	13	193	1.5
Education and research	16	286	2.2
Universities and colleges	2	161 ^E	1.3
Health	48	1,658	13
Hospitals	17	560	4.4
Social services	40	1,578	12.4
Environment	8	294	2.3
Development and housing	2	152 ^E	1.2
Law, advocacy and politics	3	136	1.1
Grant-making, fundraising and volunteer work promotion	10	687	5.4
International organizations	11	1,283	10.1
Religious organizations	31	5,228	41
Business and professional associations, unions	0 ^F	F	F
Groups not classified elsewhere	2	99 ^E	0.8

^E use with caution

^F too unreliable to be published

Source: Statistics Canada, 2013 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating.

Table 4
Donor rate and amounts donated, by canvassing method, 2013

Canvassing method	Donor rate			Total donations					
	All donors	Primary donors ¹	Other donors	All donors	Primary donors ¹	Other donors	All donors	Primary donors ¹	Other donors
By mail	27	48	25 [†]	1,731	1,059	672 [†]	13.6	12.6	15.4
By telephone	7	15	7 [†]	314 ^E	F	113	2.5	2.4	2.6
Television or radio ad	9	12	9 [†]	249	108 ^E	141	1.9	1.3	3.2
Online	14	23	14 [†]	855	508	348	6.7	6	7.9
On one's own	23	36	22 [†]	2,579	1,930	649 [†]	20.2	23	14.8
Attending a charity event	19	30	18 [†]	568	263	304	4.4	3.1	7
In memoriam donation	20	33	19 [†]	600 ^E	F	272	4.7	3.9	6.2
At work	19	25	19 [†]	558	282 ^E	275	4.4	3.4	6.3
Door-to-door canvassing	24	29	23 [†]	218	55 ^E	163 [†]	1.7	0.6	3.7
At shopping centre or on the street	34	29	35 [†]	175	26 ^E	149 [†]	1.4	0.3	3.4
Collection at a church, synagogue, mosque or other place of worship	34	67	30 [†]	4,040	3,115	924 [†]	31.7	37.1	21.1
Sponsoring someone	28	38	27 [†]	278	83 ^E	195 [†]	2.2	1	4.5
Other canvassing method	8	16	7 [†]	600	432 ^E	168 [†]	4.7	5.1	3.9

^E use with caution

^F too unreliable to be published

[†] significantly different from primary donors ($p < 0.05$)

1. Primary donors are defined as the 10% of individuals who gave the most money during the year.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2013 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating.

Table 5
Donor habits and donation planning, 2013

	Donor total	Primary donors ¹	Other donors
	percentage		
Do you decide in advance on the total amount of money you will donate to charitable organizations annually?			
Yes	14	31	12 [†]
No	86	69	88 [†]
For larger donations, do you decide in advance to which organizations you will give or do you make decisions in response to someone asking you?			
Decide in advance	28	50	26 [†]
Respond to someone asking	61	31	64 [†]
Both	11	19	10 [†]
Which of the following statements best describes your pattern of giving to charitable and non-profit organizations?			
I always donate to the same organizations	32	41	31 [†]
I vary the organizations to which I donate	28	11	30 [†]
Both	40	49	39 [†]

[†] significantly different from primary donors ($p < 0.05$)

1. Primary donors are defined as the 10% of individuals who gave the most money during the year.

Note: Percentage calculation in this table excludes responses of 'don't know' and 'not stated'.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2013 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating.

Table 6
Donors who plan on claiming a tax credit for donations made in the previous 12 months, 2013

	Household income quintiles			
	Total	Bottom two quintiles		
		Third quintile	Top two quintiles	
	percentage			
Total	48	40	47	56 [†]
Donation amount				
Less than \$100 (ref.)	25	21	25	31 [†]
\$100 to \$249	51*	42*	55* [†]	56* [†]
\$250 to \$499	65*	59*	67*	69* [†]
\$500 or more	78*	72*	77*	83* [†]
Type of donor				
Primary donors (ref.)	86	81	84	89 [†]
Other donors	44*	36*	44* [†]	51* [†]
Sex				
Men (ref.)	45	36	44 [†]	53 [†]
Women	50*	42*	51* [†]	58* [†]
Age group				
15 to 34 years (ref.)	32	23	33 [†]	36 [†]
35 to 54 years	51*	34*	45* [†]	64* [†]
55 years and older	58*	51*	63* [†]	68* [†]
Region of residence				
Atlantic Canada (ref.)	45*	37	49 [†]	53 [†]
Quebec	34*	28*	30*	45* [†]
Ontario	53	43*	53 [†]	60* [†]
Prairies	58*	52*	59*	63* [†]
Alberta	51	43	55 [†]	54 [†]
British Columbia	52	47*	52	57 [†]

* significantly different from reference category (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)

[†] significantly different from the category "bottom two quintiles" ($p < 0.05$)

Source: Statistics Canada, 2013 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating.

Table 7
Reasons for donating to charitable and non-profit organizations, 2013

	Type of donor			Sex of donor		Age group of donor		
	All donors	Primary donors ¹ (ref.)	Other donors	Men (ref.)	Women	15 to 34 years (ref.)	35 to 54 years	55 years and older
Reasons for donating				percentage				
You or someone you know has been personally affected by the cause the organization supports	67	74	66 [†]	63	72 [†]	59	71 [†]	70 [†]
The government will give you a credit on your income taxes	26	44	23 [†]	26	26	16	27 [†]	32 [†]
To fulfill religious obligations or other beliefs	29	62	26 [†]	27	31 [†]	24	27	36 [†]
To help a cause in which you personally believed	88	97	87 [†]	85	90 [†]	84	90 [†]	89 [†]
You felt compassion towards people in need	91	98	91 [†]	89	94 [†]	89	92 [†]	93 [†]
You wanted to make a contribution to the community	82	90	81 [†]	80	84 [†]	82	84	80
A family member, friend, neighbour or colleague requested that you make a donation	45	50	44 [†]	43	47 [†]	44	52 [†]	39 [†]

[†] significantly different from the reference category (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)

1. Primary donors are defined as the 10% of individuals who gave the most money during the year.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2013 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating.

Table 8
Reasons cited by donors for not giving more, 2013

	Type of donor			Sex of donor		Age group of donor		
	All donors	Primary donors ¹ (ref.)	Other donors	Men (ref.)	Women	15 to 34 years (ref.)	35 to 54 years	55 years and older
Reasons for not having given more in the previous 12 months				percentage				
You were happy with what you already gave	73	82	72 [†]	75	71 [†]	60	74 [†]	83 [†]
You could not afford to give a larger donation	69	61	70 [†]	63	75 [†]	73	69 [†]	66 [†]
No one asked you	28	23	28 [†]	30	25 [†]	35	28 [†]	21 [†]
You did not know where to make a contribution	13	6	13 [†]	14	12 [†]	21	11 [†]	8 [†]
It was hard to find a cause worth supporting	12	8	12 [†]	15	9 [†]	14	10 [†]	11
You gave time instead of money	32	37	32 [†]	31	34 [†]	36	32 [†]	30 [†]
You felt that you already gave enough money directly to people on your own, instead of through an organization	39	34	39 [†]	40	38	26	39 [†]	50 [†]
You felt that the tax credit for donations was not enough incentive to give more	16	15	17	18	15 [†]	13	17 [†]	19 [†]
You did not think the money would be used efficiently or effectively	29	32	29	32	26 [†]	23	29 [†]	34 [†]
Was this because the organization was spending too much money on fundraising efforts?	46	60	45 [†]	46	46	40	43	53 [†]
not having an impact on the cause or community they were trying to help?	39	44	38	39	39	38	40	39
not able to explain to you where or how your donation would be spent?	61	61	61	62	59	72	63 [†]	52 [†]
You did not like the way in which requests were made for donations	29	38	28 [†]	31	26 [†]	24	29 [†]	32 [†]
What did you not like about the way requests were made?								
The time of day requests were made	14	12 ^E	15	15	14	15 ^E	16	13
The number of requests	23	22	23	21	25	18	24 [†]	26 [†]
The tone in which requests were made (e.g., rude or demanding)	45	41	46	47	43	57	45 [†]	37 [†]
Multiple requests from one organization	23	21	23	23	23	20	23	25

^E use with caution

[†] significantly different from the reference category (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)

1. Primary donors are defined as the 10% of individuals who gave the most money during the year.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2013 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating.

Table 9
How donors seek information about organizations they donate to, 2013

	Type of donor			Age group of donor		
	Donor total	Primary donors ¹ (ref.)	Other donors	15 to 34 years (ref.)	35 to 54 years	55 years and older
	percentage					
When considering donating to a charity that you have not donated to in the past, do you search for information on that charity before giving?						
Yes	53	65	51 [†]	60	53 [†]	46 [†]
No	39	26	41 [†]	36	40 [†]	41 [†]
Not applicable	8	10	8	4	6 [†]	13 [†]
How do you search for this information?						
Read printed material from the charity (e.g., a brochure, annual report or financial information)	12	19	12 [†]	6	11 [†]	21 [†]
Contact the charity (e.g., by phone, in person) or visit the charity's website	56	60	56	63	58 [†]	47 [†]
Look up the charity on the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) website	10	12	10	10	10	11 [†]
Ask someone (e.g., family, friends or colleagues)	25	30	24 [†]	16	25 [†]	36 [†]
Awareness of monitoring mechanisms of charitable organizations						
Know how to verify whether an organization is a registered charity	36	54	34 [†]	28	38 [†]	42 [†]
Is aware of any organizations that monitor how charities use their donations in Canada	18	29	17 [†]	13	19 [†]	21 [†]

[†] significantly different from the reference category (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)

1. Primary donors are defined as the 10% of individuals who gave the most money during the year.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2013 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating.

Table A.1
Donations of food, material goods and bequests in a will, 2013

	Food donations		Material good donations		Bequest in a will ¹	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
	percentage					
Total	53	66 [†]	70	82 [†]	2	3
15 to 34 years (ref.)	45	59 [†]	59	79 [†]	2 ^E	2 ^E
35 to 54 years	61*	74* [†]	77*	86* [†]	2 ^E	3* [†]
55 years and older	55*	64 [†]	76*	81 [†]	4*	4*

* significantly different from reference category (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)

[†] significantly different from men ($p < 0.05$)

1. Includes donations made to a charitable or non-profit organization through a bequest in a will or any other financial planning tool, such as an insurance product.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2013 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating.