

# Mind the gender gap: Canadian women's role in philanthropy

MARK BOWMAN



Sometimes we men just don't get it – especially when it comes to giving and philanthropy. As a prospect researcher and fundraising consultant in Ottawa for the past decade, I've often heard the refrain that “Women don't write the big cheques.” Really?

This assertion misses the fundamental point that men and women have different perspectives, in part due to their gender. There are distinct differences in our approaches to philanthropy and community engagement and in the way men and women connect with the cause (both financial and personal).

When it comes to capacity and inclination to give, the facts and current demographic trends point squarely to women's transformative impact on philanthropy. In July 2014, a well-researched monograph entitled “*Time, Treasure, Talent: Canadian Women and Philanthropy*” by Investor Economics was published. The study argues that:

“There are increased opportunities for growth in philanthropy that will “require the participation of a broader community of women, as well as a greater level of commitment by Canadian charities to reach out to women across the country.”

This study, and other recent analyses and ongoing media coverage, have identified the increasingly important role that women are playing in the Canadian economy. Over the next decade it is predicted that women will be the initial beneficiaries of a substantial transfer of wealth, as well as coming into their own as leaders in the business world and as entrepreneurs. Enrollment in universities by women now surpasses men.

## Minding the gender gap

Why is it so important that we mind this gender gap especially when it comes to identifying, cultivating and stewarding women for their philanthropic support?

First, we need to explore some of the fundamental characteristics and motivations of women when it comes to personal and societal value of giving. Then, we need to look at how these factors impact on philanthropic decisions and activities and consider strategies to more fully engage women donors.

In order to validate the findings of the “Time, Treasure, Talent” study, I met with several experienced women fundraisers to review the study and to hear about their experiences in philanthropy. In the course of these discussions, I discovered that women in Ottawa are developing innovative philanthropic opportunities – two of which I will highlight later: the Royal Ottawa Foundation for Mental Health's “Women for Mental Health” program and a grassroots organization called “100 Women Who Care.”

So, what are the distinguishing features that contribute to women's role in embracing philanthropy? While there is no single dominant motivator, the following key themes were highlighted in the study and corroborated in my discussions with the senior Ottawa fundraisers:

- Importance of peer-to-peer relationships: The study noted that “women tend to listen to other women and that a woman's natural interest in socializing with other women with similar values provides an opportunity to build on a community of donors one step and one meeting at a time.” Women are more likely than men to support family members and friends on behalf of a charity.
- Engagement process: Given the social context of giving and the importance of peer-to-peer relationships, women prefer more modest, less-structured and intimate settings to learn about and support charitable causes.
- Research and investigation (pre-gifting due diligence): Women are more circumspect about giving. They want to have access to qualified, objective information.

- Support of health-related and social causes: Women tend to favour these causes which reflect the “caring and nurturing” elements of the female persona.
- Volunteering and connection with charity: Women are more likely than men to volunteer for a charity and to donate, and women seek long-term and open relationships with the causes they support.
- Decision timelines and recognition: Women typically are more thoughtful about their gift-giving decisions which will not be made quickly and may not be made alone.
- Nature and urgency of the cause: Smaller organizations and causes that require more attention and perceived need, garner greater support.

## New initiatives

Two local Ottawa charitable initiatives exemplify these themes from two perspectives – one from a large organization – the Royal Ottawa Foundation's (the Royal) **Women for Mental Health** and the other from a grassroots approach, the **100 Women Who Care** (100WWC). Both describe themselves as philanthropic organizations.



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The **Royal's Women for Mental Health** initiative started in 2011 in support of the Foundation's \$25 million capital campaign. To date, this program has raised \$1.5 million. From an initial group of 20 founding members, the Royal now has over 400 participants. One of its biggest successes has been engaging a broader audience and reducing the stigma of mental illness. The Royal encourages their Women for Mental Health participants to meet informally and provides them with information on mental health issues and advice on how to promote the cause. The Foundation has developed many touch points with these women throughout the year including monthly e-news, annual celebratory events, welcome kits for new members, invitations to the Royal's public lecture series and its annual Women in Mind Conference, to mention a few.

The other local organization, **100 Women Who Care (100WWC)** started last year, modeled after a national initiative which, ironically, was established by men called "100 Men Who Care." This women's group meets quarterly with the simple aim of raising \$100 from each participant for one cause four times per year. The group meets at a pub in central Ottawa and consistently attracts 85+ participants. The format is a one-hour meeting where participants hear presentations from three local charities. Attendees then make out their cheque directly to the charity they have decided to support or divide the \$100 among 2 or 3 if they want to support more than one. Participants nominate charities at each meeting and

three are selected at random for the following meeting. Total donations average \$11,000 per meeting. 100WWC recently initiated a network table at their events for those new to the group to facilitate their introduction to other attendees.

Another poignant irony is that 100WWC typically attracts three times the number of participants and raises three times as much money as their male counterparts, Ottawa's 100 Men Who Care group.

These two initiatives demonstrate the findings of the study, particularly women's engagement in social and health-related causes and connecting on a "peer-to-peer" basis. While each organization promotes itself as primarily philanthropic, their success is not only measured in the dollars they raise, but increasing the connections they make with like-minded women from various walks of life. There is a strong networking component which is intrinsic to these initiatives and, I suspect, uniquely female, in the sense that they engage, educate and promote. In the case of the Royal, this group has had a significant impact on demystifying mental health issues while raising awareness and support for their cause.

### What can we draw from this discussion?

- Greater attention needs to be paid to the influence and perspective of women with respect to how they are approached and stewarded.
- Input from women must be promoted and considered during the strategic planning, implementation and delivery of philanthropic activities including capital campaigns and annual programs.
- Greater participation by women in the management of philanthropic organizations, particularly at the board level, is required.
- Development of programs or approaches along the lines of women's giving circles such as those developed by the Royal and 100WWC should be considered as part of the overall fundraising plan.

Fundamentally, fundraising is not about the money raised, but about knowing your donors. One critical element of this approach is appreciating the unique role that women play in our daily lives. To quote the study, "*Women have the ability to make a significant change in our society through selfless acts of generosity.*"

Women's role is vital to philanthropy. Their generosity is not measured by the cheque that they sign but in the value that they bring in promoting a cause worth supporting, demonstrating a deeper dedication to our communities and forging a stronger culture of caring and giving back.

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