

# are you called to collaborative giving?

## INTRODUCTION

From the construction of Solomon's Temple, to the distribution of aid in the Acts Church, God has often called his people to be generous together when a great task lay ahead. This story continues today, and you may be called to play an important role.

From Madagascar to the Czech Republic, givers like you are realizing the power and potential of collaborative giving. They are gathering to pray, share meals, learn, laugh... and give. It's not adding impact; it's multiplying impact!

Across Europe, multiple giving collaborations are fueled by a desire to see a reversal in the decline of the believing Church on the continent. Guided by the Holy Spirit, families have begun collaborating to fund evangelism and discipleship in their nations, mobilizing financial resources while building Christian fellowship in the process.

In the USA, a group of givers have the audacious goal of translating scripture into every language on planet Earth. They gather to share and learn about Bible poverty and the latest innovations in translation, and give to solve the problem of Bible poverty forever.

In Dallas, young professionals gather to pray, learn about strategic giving, and collaborate in their generosity. These 20- and 30-somethings, just launching their



careers, have now mobilized \$1 million for Kingdom causes in their community, all while building friendships and growing closer to Jesus Christ together.

There are dozens more groups like these, each as compelling as the last, with God's fingerprints on them all.

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*We believe that God is calling generous leaders who would build communities that are generous together. Christians who gather to share life, stories, prayers, and strategies, and give to solve the pressing issues they see around them.*

The purpose of this document is to clearly explain what is happening globally in Christian giving collaborations, and to help you discern if God might be calling you to launch a new giving community. For those who desire to learn more, we provide contact information at the end of this document.

## IS COLLABORATION FOR ME?

Those who choose to collaborate in giving tend to be busy people who nonetheless choose to make margin in their schedule for giving together. There is often a sense of calling. They possess a strong desire for impact, a heart to grow with and learn from peers, and a relatively high giving capacity.

In the right context, collaboration brings several advantages.

### Fellowship

Faithful generosity, like any virtue, takes endurance and fortitude. The joyful fellowship of like-minded peers inspires new giving and brings joy to current giving. A joyful community also provides a wonderful on-ramp to new givers who are stepping into the biblical generosity journey.

### Strategic Insight

Collaboration in giving allows great learning to occur. Just as a team of scientists will go further than a single researcher, a team of givers learns more rapidly than a giver acting alone.

### Sustainability

A group of givers can work toward solving a problem for the long haul, without dependence upon the commitment level and financial status of one single donor.

### Efficiency

The staff necessary to run a world-class giving operation is expensive. For most givers, the cost makes it unreasonable. But in a collaborative community, the group can collectively afford resources that any one giver could not, sharpening and strengthening the overall giving of the group.

### Systemic Impact

Some large-scale issues are best solved by a coordinated, high-level approach.

Collaboration, like all good things, requires commitment and persistence for success. Talented administration is necessary (and can be staffed, as we will describe), and a catalytic leader will need to deploy social capital to gather and sustain the group. This paper is intended to help you consider these benefits and costs.

## COLLABORATIVE GIVING: LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

In 2019 the Maclellan Foundation embarked upon a study of the state of collaborative giving, seeking learnings that might equip and bless givers around the world. In total, over fifty interviews spanning several months led to significant learnings, including common success factors among collaborations worldwide.

### Definition and Scope

The research focused on kingdom giving collaborations. Each word is intentional:

#### Kingdom

The group's members and purpose are explicitly and openly Christian.

#### Giving

The group consists of givers who are actively mobilizing financial resources

#### Collaboration

Multiple people give together (minimum group size: 3).

Out of 37 prospective groups across the globe, 20 were identified that met all three criteria and were active, ongoing kingdom giving collaborations. Among these, commonalities and success factors were gathered. Also, stories of failed collaborations provided helpful lessons learned.

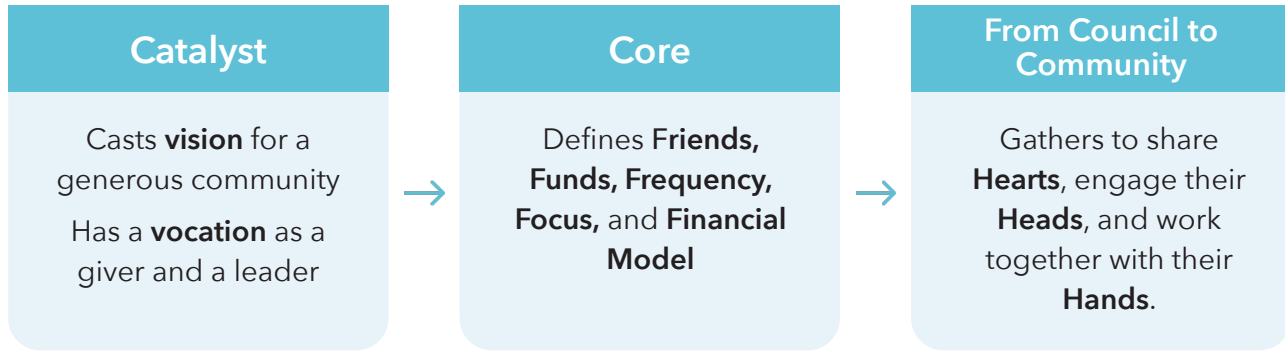
## BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

Upon a review of scripture, it was seen that modern giving collaborations share key commonalities with biblical collaborations.

- 1 Collaborative giving begins in response to a **clear need** that God has put on the hearts of key leaders.
- 2 Collaborative giving allows givers to freely make **individual giving decisions**.
- 3 Gifts flow through **trustworthy channels**.

## BEST PRACTICES: LAUNCHING A COLLABORATION

The diagram on the next page demonstrates the way most collaborations launch. The **catalyst** is the prime mover for a group. This person has a vision for the group and the bandwidth to see it through, and a vocation as a giver and leader. They are a community leader, often with a successful business background, and are able to convene others. The catalyst, in some cases, walks in partnership with a trusted advisor who shapes the vision with them. The catalyst also designates someone who will focus on execution (more to come on this).



The **core** (3-5) is the initial conversational circle in the “pre-launch” phase. These leaders build the vision with the catalyst. The core - consisting of givers who are peers to the catalyst - comes together for a season to pray, strengthen relationships, and begin outlining a plan for the collaboration.

The **council** (8-12) represents the launch phase. Here, roughly a dozen individuals or families come together at the invitation of the core. Once launched, the collaboration often grows into a vibrant **community** (20-40+) that shares in the effort together. At these larger sizes, the group must remember to focus on the heart (spiritual/relational dynamics), even while engaging the heads and hands (the intellectual and practical dynamics of giving together).

Often, a JOG (Journey of Generosity retreat) plays a key role at one or more steps in this process - either inspiring the catalyst, or as a tool for the collaboration to invite and envision new prospective members.

### BEST PRACTICES: OPERATING A COLLABORATION

#### Two Necessary Roles

The most common mistake when becoming generous together is thinking that no administrative help is needed. In other words,

the thinking goes, “We are givers... let’s find some ministries and start giving!” Very quickly, successful collaborations recognize the need to fill two key roles, the Manager and the Expert, which can be paid or filled with volunteers.



The Collaboration **Manager** sits between the givers and the ministries, serving as the logistical hub for the collaboration. A talented administrator and capable professional, the manager keeps the collaboration running, making the group’s vision a reality. While the catalyst provides the convening power, the manager plans events, engages ministries, writes grant reports, coordinates with givers, etc. A sample job description is available upon request.

The **Expert** advisor is relied upon for guidance in evaluating projects. Givers usually do not have the bandwidth or expertise to evaluate ministry strategies and proposals well, so this role is critical for the success of the group. Subject-matter expertise is the key qualifier for this role. The role is flexible. If the group gives to more than one sector, they might partner with more than one expert. Or, a council of experts could serve in this role collectively. In some cases, the manager may also serve as the expert.

### The Charter

The core group must agree on five key facets of collaboration. Putting these down in writing anchors the group and brings clarity as they launch. A detailed worksheet on these parameters - and example group charters - are available upon request.

**1 Focus** - What big vision is the Holy Spirit calling us to, for God's glory? What Kingdom purpose will anchor this group? The group's faith goals may drive a geographic focus and/or a sector focus. i.e. "Homelessness in our city" or "Strategic church planting in our region" or "Great Commission projects in the 10/40 window".

**2 Friends** - Groups are usually givers-only. Any ministry professionals present are there as trusted advisors to the givers and do not advocate for one specific ministry.

**3 Funds** - Since the purpose of the group is to give, is there a minimum annual gift level? Also - will we take a marketplace approach, or a mutual fund approach?

**Marketplace** - The most common approach. Great projects are brought before the group, and then givers choose which projects they individually want to contribute toward.

**Mutual Fund** - The group pools financial resources, and giving decisions are handled by a central decision-making body. This can work well for funding projects where information is hard to come by (i.e. in closed countries, etc).

**4 Frequency** - When will we gather? Most meet at least annually for an overnight retreat, with shorter and/or virtual meetings in between. Some groups have already held online gatherings and have developed learnings on how to do so successfully.

**5 Financial Model** - How will operational costs be funded? Givers often cover their own lodging and meal costs, but what about paid staff time, and the core operational budget? A key donor (often the catalyst, at least initially) can cover the hard costs so the group's contributions can go 100% to ministry. Alternatively, groups either assess a percentage fee on overall group giving, or charge a flat membership fee.

# next steps

We invite you to prayerfully consider whether collaborative giving is for you. To dig deeper, please take a look at “five steps to launch your giving collaboration: generous together 201” [available upon request]. It lays out a clear roadmap for getting started.

If you feel ready to start the process, we’d love to brainstorm with you. (We do not charge for advice or services; it is part of our mission to serve the courageous givers who launch and run new giving collaborations, for God’s glory.) We have many documents and processes that can guide a core group in setting up sound guidelines, and guide the manager in administering the collaboration.

To reach us, send an email to either address below. We would be delighted to serve you as you envision your community to become generous together.

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*This document covered a lot of ground! Here, we imagine a hypothetical case study that illustrates the ideas we've explored.*

Paul is the owner of a local tent manufacturing business. In January, he begins praying about opportunities for leaving a greater Kingdom legacy. God begins to lay the topic of youth evangelism and discipleship on his heart. In February he has lunch with three like-minded business leaders in town – Barnabas, Mary, and Luke – to share this passion. In March, this core group assembles along with spouses to pray, fellowship, and continue aligning around the vision of giving together. They agree that it is “go-time”.

In April Paul asks Timothy, one of the young leaders at his company, to spend 10 hours per week of paid company time as Manager of the collaboration. Meanwhile, the group has begun inviting others in earnest, hoping to secure attendees to their mid-June launch event, which Paul will underwrite. 10 families join the collaboration initially, each committing a minimum of \$10,000 in giving – meaning there will be at least \$100,000 awarded to the first slate of projects identified.

In May, Timothy recruits Lydia to serve as the group's expert advisor. Lydia is retired after spending 20 years in a major local youth evangelism ministry. She knows what works, what doesn't, and who the local players are. Timothy, guided by Lydia, solicits proposals from several ministries in the area, guiding them toward a \$25-50k grant size. As the groups deliver draft proposals, Lydia helps Timothy give initial feedback to the ministries, who sharpen up their proposals. Eventually, they select five excellent proposals to bring to the collaboration in the Fall, kindly letting the other ministries know that they have not been selected, but can apply in the future.

In September, the first marketplace of giving occurs at a nice local resort, as an overnight gathering. Participants cover their own room costs. The core group covers the hard costs of the event together. The event is worshipful, intimate, and relational. But it is also strategic and information-driven, with the goal of effectively mobilizing financial resources.

Four out of the five vetted proposals receive great enthusiasm from the group and are mostly funded. The total need for the four is \$150,000 and they received \$142,000 in commitments. Paul decides to fund the remaining gap, so the four projects are fully funded. (The fifth project received very little giver enthusiasm, so Timothy lets that ministry know it has not been selected.) As the event closes, the group celebrates the four, fully-funded projects to reach the youth in their community! Givers have agreed in advance to let Timothy know when they have given their gifts to the agreed-upon projects. Timothy follows up in 30-45 days with all those who haven't yet confirmed their gift.

As the group continues forward, Timothy will collect results and stories from the four funded projects and work with Lydia to solicit a new slate of proposals for next year's gathering (including the possibility of continued funding for the first four projects). In a few months, they'll convene the collaboration in-person again to celebrate results, share learnings and progress, continue to cast vision, and build deeper relationships. The RSVP's begin coming in, and it appears the group will grow! ...and the story continues from here...