

# OC LEADER BOARD

Opinion, Analysis, Insight

## Does Giving Size Really Matter?

When it comes to philanthropic impact, size isn't everything. Significant monetary gifts understandably garner high visibility. They can transform communities and shift the trajectory of an organization's future.

But as we celebrate seven-figure philanthropy, it's important to recognize that smaller gifts can move the needle just as powerfully.

In fact, most charitable gifts are modest. According to 2017 IRS data, the average total charitable deduction was \$5,508. In California, the average person who reported giving to charity donated an annual total of \$5,845, in most cases representing support for numerous organizations and causes.

Gifts at more modest levels can be just as effective as larger gifts, provided there is sound strategy behind them. At the **Orange County Community Foundation (OCCF)**—where we manage more than 570 charitable funds and have granted more than \$650 million in partnership with generous donors and families over the past 30 years—we've seen high-impact philanthropy across the spectrum of gift size, and in the process have noted several drivers of impactful giving that don't depend on the number of zeroes involved.



**By Shelley Hoss**  
CEO and President, Orange County Community Foundation

### All Together Now

The African proverb, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together," is especially true in philanthropy.

To amplify your impact, find a team, share knowledge and pool resources. For instance, OCCF's Impact Philanthropy Group is made up of charitable-minded professionals who join together each year to give strategically to a local issue of their choosing.

Members of the group contribute \$1,000 each year, which is then matched by OCCF's board, creating an annual granting pool of \$60,000—60 times each person's individual contribution. After 10 years together, the group is nearing half a million dollars in collective giving, which has supported the work of 44 Orange County nonprofits—achieving a combined impact that would be impossible to achieve alone.

### Find the Tipping Point

In Orange County, one chronically homeless person generates annual costs to our community of more than \$100,000, according to a comprehensive **University of California-Irvine** study.

However, if that same person is placed into a supportive housing environment, those costs are cut in half. These individuals report 88% less reliance on donated food, 78% fewer ambulance transports, 100% fewer arrests, and 90% fewer court appearances.

What's more, the national average to house a family in rapid rehousing is less than \$900 per month. In other words, keeping an individual or family housed pays huge dividends in both the short and long term. A savvy philanthropic investment to prevent loss of housing, or rapidly restore housing if an incident of homelessness occurs, benefits not just the individual or family, but our community as a whole.

### Create a Ripple Effect

Certain philanthropic investments can dramatically impact outcomes for an individual during their lifetime and for generations to come.

For example, after years of helping first-generation students gain access to higher education, longtime OCCF donor **Ranney Draper** realized that these same students faced significant barriers to completing their college degrees.

In fact, 89% of low-income, first-generation students leave college without a degree, and the dropout rate for first-generation students is four times that of second-generation students.

In response, Ranney launched the OC Promise Initiative—a comprehensive program of mentoring, coaching and student support—in partnership with OCCF and several fellow donors.

The end game? For just \$1,300 per student, 50 students who participated in the pilot year of the program developed the self-reliance and accountability needed to earn a four-year degree and dramatically

improve their future earning potential.

According to a 2019 Bureau of Labor Statistics study, individuals with a college degree earn nearly double what their non-degreed peers do. Over the course of their lifetimes, degree holders are projected to earn a staggering \$1 million more than those without college degrees—who could imagine a better return on a \$1,300 investment.

### Big Fish in a Small Pond

Many highly effective charitable organizations are operating on shoestring budgets. In fact, 66% of U.S. nonprofits have annual budgets of less than \$1 million. A smaller gift to one of these grassroots organizations can have an out-sized impact on the nonprofit and make all the difference for the individuals they support.

For example, **Sailing Fascination Foundation (SFF)**, which provides free sailing lessons to individuals with physical and developmental disabilities, as well as wounded veterans, has brought hope and encouragement to more than 1,000 participants—while operating on an annual budget of only \$5,000. Just imagine the impact you could have on a small but mighty nonprofit like SFF!



Sailing Fascination Foundation helps Special Olympics

So while we celebrate the generosity behind large charitable gifts, let's also honor the more modest gifts that are making an enormous difference in the lives of individuals and families in our community every day. With a sound strategy and a knowledgeable partner in your corner, impact comes in just your size.

*(Editor's Note: Shelley Hoss has served at the helm of the Orange County Community Foundation, one of the most prominent local philanthropic organizations, for the past 20 years. The Business Journal's list of 2019 Largest Charitable Gifts starts on page 22).*

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