



## Tips for Social Justice Giving Circles

### What is a Giving Circle?

Something can be called a giving circle any time a group of people gets together to pool and distribute resources. It's a broad term! People have been giving collectively in community for a long time - way before anyone started talking about giving circles. Giving circles can include a small or large number of people, can go on for years or be time-limited, can include political study and other forms of collective action, and can include giving by members only or focus on fundraising.

### Not All Giving is the Same.

The overwhelming majority of dollars circulating in philanthropy do not support changing the conditions that keep people poor and powerless. A 2020 report from the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy found that only 1% of community foundation grants go towards Black communities. Only 2% of all philanthropic dollars go towards social justice work.

### Learn to Give Towards Change.

Social Justice Giving Circles are a great way to build community and to take action for social change. These groups center racial justice and systems change, and are connected to a growing movement of people mobilizing resources to support grassroots organizing led by communities of color building real power.

### North Star Fund Can Help.

We've been organizing people across race and class to support social change for over forty years. We practice power-shifting philanthropy by raising money that is distributed by community activist-led committees in New York City and the Hudson Valley. A North Star Fund-inspired giving circle can take many forms—some ideas are below. We love to see people come together and give towards collective liberation! [More on how North Star Fund works.](#)

### How Can I Use this Resource?

This is not a how-to guide! This list of tips is intended to help you ground in our values, provide key questions for addressing power and equity in giving, and to point you towards additional resources.

# A North Star Fund-inspired Giving Circle...

## Starts with Values

Values are the foundation for any giving circles, whether or not we know it. Get clear on what values are held by members of your giving circle and how you want to act on them with intention. Here are [North Star Fund's vision and values](#). Use these as a jumping off point.

**Questions:** What values are shared by members in your group? What are your individual and collective visions for liberation - on a small and big scale? What concrete actions will you take to practice these values as a giving circle?

## Is a Community of Practice

A community of practice is a space where participants deepen their knowledge, practice acting on their values, reflect on their experiences, and strengthen relationships over time.

**Questions:** How can your giving circle center relationships and bring people in with intention? How does your giving circle build in time for education, reflection, and taking on new practices? How can you create feedback loops within your group and between you and the people you fundraise from or make grants to?

## Addresses Power

Some kinds of change can be made without contesting power. Structural change, however, requires confronting power imbalances at their source. North Star Fund believes that grassroots organizing is a powerful strategy to make lasting systems change. We also believe that addressing power imbalances is essential to how we do grantmaking and giving - including how we give, how decisions are made, and what work we support.

### Social justice philanthropy resources

- North Star Fund [community organizing criteria](#)
- [Trust-based Philanthropy](#)
- Resource Generation - [What is Social Justice Philanthropy?](#)

**Questions:** How do you honestly assess the power dynamics that exist within and outside your giving circle? When you identify imbalances in power, how do you counteract/transform/or upend them?

## Funds Organizing

North Star Fund is committed to following the leadership of local organizers by vesting decision-making power in our Community Funding Committee (CFC). We have three CFCs - Hudson Valley CFC, the Let Us Breathe CFC, and the New York City CFC. [You can see all of our current CFC members here.](#) Consider starting with the groups that our committees have selected and making your giving decisions from there.

**New York City & Hudson Valley Grants:** [Spring 2020 grants recipients](#)

[The Let Us Breathe Fund](#) is the only NYC-based fund led by and for Black activists organizing around police reform and building Black liberation. [Let Us Breathe 2019 grantees](#)

## Builds Sustained Commitment

The gauge of success for a giving circle doesn't need to be how long it exists. Movements are about the long game, but we hear over and over again from giving circles that it's hard to sustain interest year after year. Your giving circle might not last forever, but hopefully your relationship to giving does. (Hot tip: One easy way to sustain commitment is by asking giving circle members or the people you fundraise to make recurring monthly gifts!)

**Questions for getting started:** How long do you expect your giving circle to exist? How can you build your giving circle now to ensure that members can stay engaged over time? What kind of relationships and communication can you have with the people or groups who are supported by the circle?

**Questions for evaluating:** Did you meet the goal that you set out? Did you fulfill commitments you made and act with accountability? Did giving circle empower your group members to develop a thoughtful, confident and committed giving practice?

## Additional Online Resources

### Giving Circle Resources & How-To Guides

\*Not all of these focus on social justice giving

- [Philanthropy Together](#) - check out their [Launchpad](#) program
- [Grapevine](#)
- [Amplifier](#) - check out [Giving Panorama](#)

# Six Tips to Turn Your Book Club into a Giving Circle

## Here's the deal.

A lot of people are joining or participating in book clubs right now. It's pretty common to read something in a book club—a personal narrative, political analysis, etc.—and get inspired to take action. The good news is that whatever action you're thinking about, someone is probably already doing it!

## Why turn towards giving?

A lot of time the authors who are getting social and actual capital for their books are drawing directly from social movements. Most of the time the people who make up those movements aren't seeing compensation for producing that knowledge, and movement organizations aren't always seeing the benefits of it either. Giving is one way to support those movements and movements leaders working towards collective liberation.

## A few tips.

1. **Don't spring this on people!** Tell people in advance. No coercion into financial commitment if they signed up for something else.
2. **Remember this is an invitation, not a demand.** Having a transformational learning experience with people can open up space to ask what's next and what's possible together.
3. **Start small.** Make sure your goals match the level of interest and commitment of the group.
4. **Staying grounded in practice.** No one is expecting you to be a professional grantmaker. This is about taking resources that you have and turning it into power for the movement. Take action, reflect, adjust and repeat.
5. **Identify the issue you want to give to.** Refer to the reading you did. Where does power need to be built based on what you learned?  
\*\*Check out our list of grantees that match your issue areas - you can trust these are groups that are led by people most impacted by injustice and have experience building power and changing systems.
6. **Give!** (Here are some ideas)
  - o Ask each person to make a commitment - as a monthly donor!
  - o Invite someone from North Star Fund to come speak to your group and turn it into a fundraiser.
  - o Challenge each person in the group to become a donor organizer—use a learning from the book to start a conversation with another person in their life about the importance of supporting grassroots organizing.

Want to learn more? There's always more to learn at [northstarfund.org](http://northstarfund.org).