

'Evidence is crucial' for philanthropists to determine charity donations, says new research

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Research from the University of Birmingham has concluded that the process of giving to charity has to be grounded in evidence rather than reaction.

The research conducted by Caroline Greenhalgh and Professor Paul Montgomery from the Third Sector Research Centre at the University of Birmingham shows how "evidence is crucial to determine whether or not a program works but far too few funders use evidence when reaching

funding decisions."

During the COVID19 period many charities are experiencing a rise in demand from a growing number of people as the pandemic has affected hundreds and thousands of people whose livelihoods and income has been eroded. However, the charity sector is facing a funding crisis as due to the pandemic general donations have fallen which has forced many charities to scale back their programs and services and laying off staff. To help with this, the UK government has begun to give limited support to charities now.

As charities are looking for major donors it is essential that philanthropic donations which are subsidized by the Treasury generate the best possible return on investment. It is known that giving resources should be grounded in evidence and yet few philanthropists practice evidence-based philanthropy, and some contend that there is [insufficient evidence](#) on which to base their funding decisions.

The researchers from the Third Sector Research Centre conducted a [systematic review](#) to identify factors that promoting or limiting the use of evidence by philanthropists and to rigorously evaluate all existing research on this issue.

Caroline Greenhalgh who was the lead researcher says: "As charities are scaling back their services and, in some instances, collapsing altogether, it is vital that donors make informed decisions about which to fund as part of rebuilding the [charity](#) and their work. Our research highlighted there are three main barriers to philanthropists or funders using evidence were identified which were inadequate knowledge transfer and difficulties accessing evidence, challenges in understanding the evidence and insufficient resources."

The researchers concluded that a failure to understand what evidence is

needed, the cost (for charities) of generating evidence and inadequate transfer of knowledge, could be addressed by introducing more knowledge-sharing networks, synthesizing the available evidence, expanding access to evidence through open resource materials and re-framing 'failure' so that charities are more willing to share evidence of ineffective programs would also be helpful.

More information: Caroline Greenhalgh et al. A systematic review of the barriers to and facilitators of the use of evidence by philanthropists when determining which charities (including health charities or programmes) to fund, *Systematic Reviews* (2020). [DOI: 10.1186/s13643-020-01448-w](https://doi.org/10.1186/s13643-020-01448-w)

Provided by University of Birmingham

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