

Charitable giving has slow, steady growth in 2012

Molly Vorwerck, USA TODAY 7:58 p.m. EDT June 17, 2013

1 Charitable giving was up 3.5% last year, mainly benefiting animals, the arts and the environment, according to the 2012 Giving USA report from the Center for Philanthropy at Indiana University.



(Photo: Seth Wenig, AP)

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Arts, animals and the environment benefited most
- Donors who focused on the basics during the recession are rethinking their giving
- Expert says it will take another six or seven years to get back to the 2007 peak of \$344.48 billion in donations

Charitable giving was up 3.5% last year, mainly benefiting animals, the arts and the environment, according to the 2012 Giving USA report from the Center for Philanthropy at Indiana University.

Overall, Americans gave \$316.23 billion to charity.

"One of the things that's probably the most notable is that in spite of a stubbornly resistant unemployment rate and slow growth in the economy, giving from individuals, foundations and corporations has grown," said Patrick Rooney, executive director of the Center for Philanthropy.

He sees that as a promising trend.

After a weak economy produced a sharp decline of 17.6% in 2008, charitable giving recovered slowly through 2011, the center's figures show.

Donations to humanities-focused organizations — museums, children's art programs and such — grew by 7.8%. Groups representing animal and environmental causes had a 6.8% increase.

"During the Great Recession and immediately afterwards, some people said, 'I'm going to re-balance my philanthropic portfolio and spend more money on housing the homeless, feeding the hungry, and basic job training,' " Rooney says. "That persisted for a while, and less money was going to art and culture, animals and education. Now we are three years out of the recession, and people are returning their philanthropic portfolios to something that is more normal to before the recession began."

Still, he says, it will take another six or seven years to get back to the 2007 peak of \$344.48 billion in charitable donations.

Hurricane Sandy resulted in \$223 million in donations to organizations providing relief services in November and December of 2012. Another \$100 million came in early in 2013, the center estimates.

Eileen Heisman, president and CEO of the National Philanthropic Trust, which studies charitable giving, said a decline in donations to religious organizations reflects a social trend.

"People don't see religious organizations as the center of their communities any more," Heisman said. "There was a time when your church — where you belong with God — defined you, and I don't think religion is the centerpiece of the American small town or center of identity like it used to be. So when the amount of religious activity goes down, funding to these groups goes down."