

**The Clarence Foundation aims to promote engaged international philanthropy by catalysing global giving circles. These are, roughly, the philanthropic equivalent of book clubs. Groups of 5–15 people pool their resources, meet on a regular basis to explore an issue, then decide how to grant those resources. Meetings are informal and typically held at participants’ homes. The life of the giving circle is usually six to nine months, with meetings once a month.**

It all began in early 2001. Following a trip I made to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a small group came together informally to discuss relevant issues and raise funds for projects in DRC. The lessons learned from that work and the excitement created by donor engagement inspired us to create a more structured giving circle programme with a formal time and monetary commitment.<sup>1</sup> Our programmes now feature guest presentations from leaders in the international philanthropy field, so participants can combine learning with a hands-on group grantmaking experience.<sup>2</sup>

We believe global giving circles have tremendous promise because they can help participants overcome some of the key psychological barriers to global giving that have been outlined in this edition of *Alliance*. It is not surprising that many prospective donors feel overwhelmed by the magnitude of global problems today and are unsure of how or where to begin. Others remain sceptical as to whether contributions overseas will reach their intended recipients owing to perceptions about corruption and waste.

Giving circles can directly counter such barriers by providing a supportive structure for global giving. Donors can leverage their contribution with a group of others who tackle grantmaking challenges together and break down overwhelming global problems into bite-sized pieces. Giving circles enable participants to communicate directly via email with change agents overseas. This builds trust and allows donors to personally experience how comparatively small investments can have a real impact.

Other important benefits include helping project a positive image of Americans or Westerners in the world; inspiring donors to make their first site visit overseas, which almost inevitably leads to a lifelong commitment to international giving; getting new people involved as participants tell their family, friends and colleagues about it; and, perhaps most importantly, enabling participants to explore the values that underlie their giving preferences.

The Clarence Foundation has completed two giving circles to date. This year, we are starting new groups on child trafficking and microfinance. We will also work with individual donors, international organizations and community foundations to help them organize giving circles of their own. We believe the model has great potential. Who knows? Some day, global giving circles may be as common as book clubs.

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<sup>1</sup> The commitment last year was \$3,500 and this year it’s \$5,000.

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<sup>2</sup> Our curriculum has been developed in association with Grantmakers Without Borders and End Poverty Foundation.

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