

JANUARY 2026

STATE OF CENTRAL IOWA

# PHILANTHROPIC Giving Report



A COLLABORATIVE STUDY BY

ISAACSON//SYVERSON  
CONSULTING

 **compendium**  
INSIGHTS

# About the Study

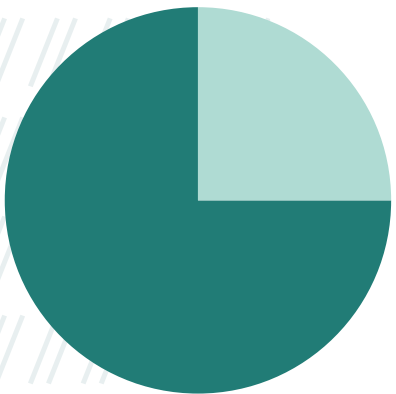
Central Iowa nonprofits are facing mounting external pressures. Increased community needs, rising costs, workforce challenges, and uncertain public funding all impact an organization’s ability to fulfill its mission. Now more than ever it’s important for nonprofits to understand donor intentions and priorities in order to focus their fundraising strategies.

The State of Central Iowa Philanthropic Giving Study was designed to provide insight on the local philanthropic landscape to better inform nonprofit leaders on giving trends and in turn, increase the ROI spent on fund development efforts.

The 2026 State of Central Iowa Philanthropic Giving Study was conducted by local fundraising professionals, Isaacson-Syverson Consulting and market research experts, Compendium Insights. The biennial survey was

sent to 205 philanthropic individuals and corporate and foundation representatives located in central Iowa. The survey garnered a 46% response rate, a 7% higher response rate than the previous study. Data was collected from October 14 – November 12, 2025.

Nationally, 74% of charitable giving dollars come from individuals either in outright gifts or bequests. Foundation giving amounts to 19% while 7% comes from corporations. The motivation behind individual giving decisions is oftentimes different from corporate and foundation giving decisions. The survey was crafted to reflect these differences and the data that follows represents responses from each unique giving group – individual, corporate and foundation.  
(Source: Giving USA 2025)



Nationally, nearly ¾ of charitable giving comes from individuals.

Giving USA 2023

# Influences on Giving

Understanding donor motivations is invaluable to nonprofit leaders. Belief in the organization’s mission remains the number one motivating factor to give by all funding sources: individuals, corporations and foundations. Individuals are also highly influenced by the belief their donation can make a difference.

Who makes the ask continues to influence an individual’s inclination to give. Eighty-two percent of individual donors stated their decision is sometimes influenced by a relationship with a board member or nonprofit staff member.

Corporate and foundation giving decisions continue to be driven primarily by a strong belief in the mission and alignment with organizational objectives, both showing increased importance. Personal relationships continue to play a meaningful, though more situational, role in influencing support. The 2026 study dives deeper into corporate and foundation influences on giving.

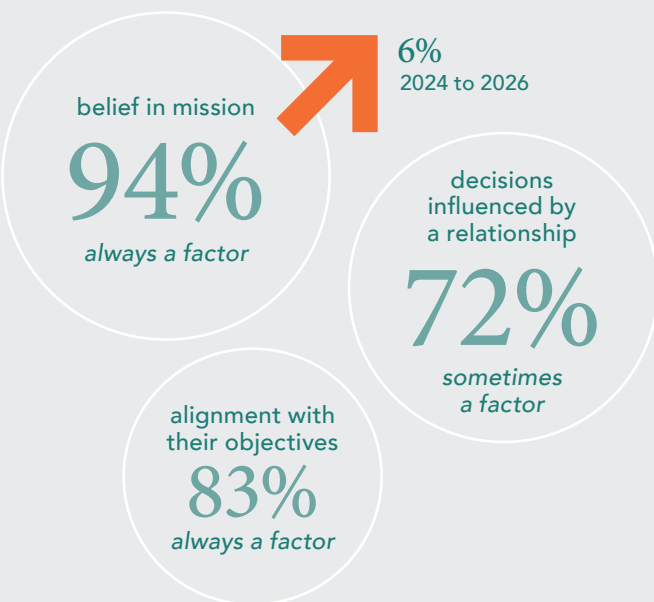
Fifty percent of corporate and foundation representatives said that giving is always influenced by their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) goals and 25% said that distribution of funds across their company’s geographic footprint is also a factor.

Other drivers that sometimes influence decisions include talent attraction/employee retention and increasing brand awareness.

## INDIVIDUAL GIVING INFLUENCES



## CORPORATION / FOUNDATION GIVING INFLUENCES



# Philanthropic Focus & Level of Support

The study also seeks to understand the focus area within the nonprofit sector where donors are choosing to direct their charitable dollars. Overall, 88% of donors indicated their areas of giving have not changed from the previous year. However, when looking back at the most recent 2024 Philanthropic Giving Report there are notable differences.

Among individuals, arts and culture, community betterment, education, and food insecurity remain the most commonly supported causes.

Education increased in priority by 11%, while healthcare and human rights saw even larger gains of 28% and 19%, respectively.



Overall 88% of all donors indicated their areas of focus have not changed from the previous year

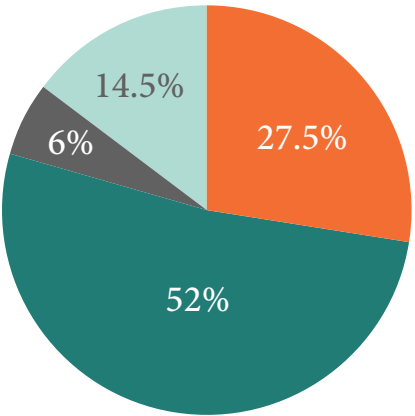
In looking at corporate and foundation priorities, food insecurity, housing, arts & culture, community betterment, and education rank the highest.

When comparing to the 2024 report, there were sharp declines in the areas of DEI (40% decrease), poverty/income equality (38% decrease), and human rights (19% decrease).

Assessing 2026 giving intent, approximately half of all donors (54%) expect their giving to remain the same, while only one-quarter plan to increase their charitable giving. 18 percent of donors are uncertain as to their philanthropic budget for the year.

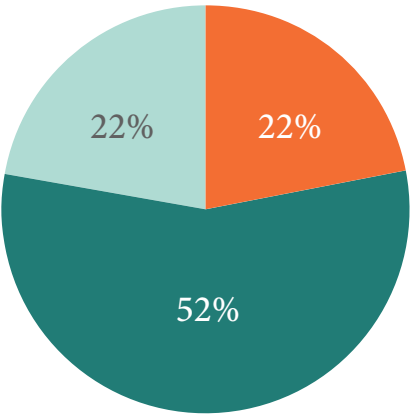
Individuals who intend to increase their giving state they are responding to a higher level of need. Individual donors with flat giving cite factors such as a fixed income, family circumstances, and health needs. Economic climate and company growth are impacting corporate and foundation philanthropic budgets.

2026 INDIVIDUAL GIVING INTENT



- intend to increase giving
- intend to stay the same
- intend to decrease giving
- uncertain of giving amount

2026 CORPORATE & FOUNDATION GIVING INTENT



- intend to increase giving
- intend to stay the same
- uncertain of giving amount



## INDIVIDUAL DONORS

“After 40 years of giving, we are starting to reduce the amount, feeling like we have contributed a significant amount to the community. We have given not only dollars, but significant time and expertise to nonprofits and now want to step back.”

“The amount of need in our community is getting greater, while corporations facing an uncertain economy are pulling back on contributions. This requires individuals that are able to step up even further.”

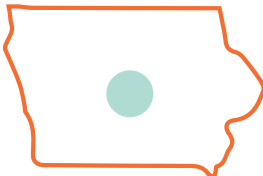
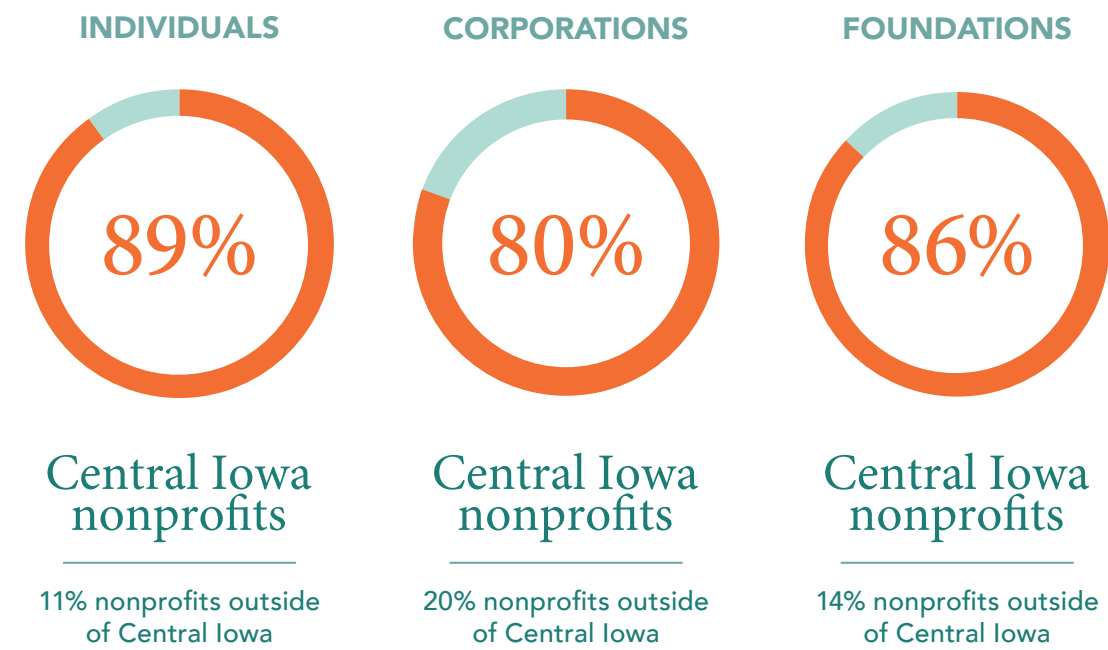
“We try to give as our net assets increase. If our assets decrease, our gifts will decrease.”



# Gift Distribution

A local focus in charitable giving continues to be a priority for central Iowa funders.

## Giving to Central Iowa v. National Nonprofits



Central Iowans are giving locally.  
January - December 2025

In looking at the number of nonprofits supported, individual donors have generally expanded their support from the last report. Conversely, foundations and corporations were more discerning in the number of nonprofits supported. Fifty percent of foundations gave to over 21 organizations in 2025, compared to 89% in 2023. Similarly, corporations also narrowed their focus with only 69% giving to 21 nonprofits or more versus 75% in 2023.



## Number of Nonprofits Supported

	INDIVIDUALS		CORPORATIONS		FOUNDATIONS	
	2025	2023	2025	2023	2025	2023
1-5	12%	14%	0%	6%	0%	0%
6-10	32%	46%	8%	0%	40%	0%
11-15	22%	17%	15%	0%	0%	0%
16-20	15%	9%	8%	19%	10%	11%
21+	19%	14%	69%	75%	50%	89%

# Communications & Recognition

Knowing how donors like to be communicated with is critical for nonprofit organizations. The preferred methods for contact vary amongst donors, stressing the need for a multi-pronged approach. The data also shows a need for nonprofits to understand donor preferences on an individualized basis.

Overall, email remains king of communication, serving as the preferred method of contact for all funding sources. Followed closely behind, however, are in-person meetings. And, as smart phones have become an essential device to many, texting has gained traction amongst donors as an efficient way of communication.

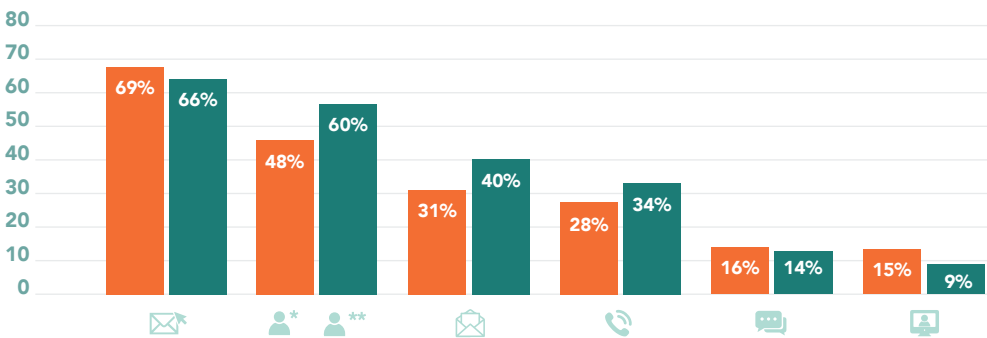
While recognition is appreciated by many donors, timely and authentic thank-you acknowledgment letters remain the most effective form of donor stewardship for individuals, with 91% stating that a timely acknowledgment letter is their preferred method of recognition. Donors did note that they are more comfortable with visible recognition if it will help garner additional contributions from the community.

Fifty-nine percent of corporations and foundations indicate inclusion in the nonprofit’s newsletter, social media, and/or email communications as their preferred recognition method. However, a close second is a thank you letter or note, preferred by 54%, up 19% from 2023 preferences. Recognition at an event on signage, in printed materials or from the stage is down approximately 30% from the last study.



### INDIVIDUAL DONORS

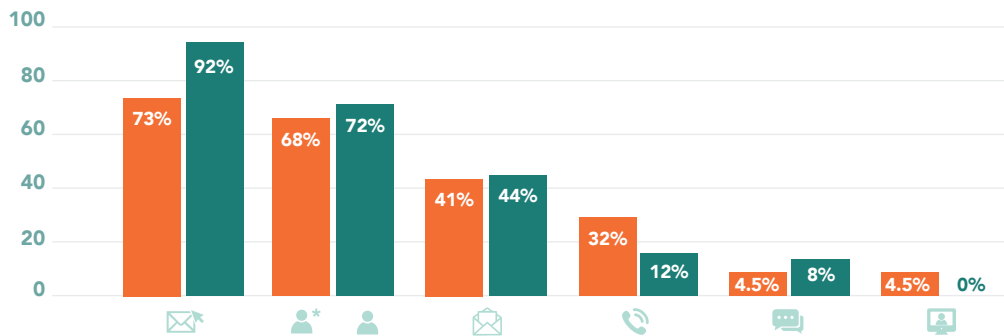
2025 2023



\*Write-in responses=In-person meeting  
\*\*Added as a response option in 2023

### CORPORATIONS & FOUNDATIONS

2025 2023



\*Other (Online application/In-person)  
'Other' removed as a response option in 2023

EMAIL MAIL PHONE TEXT VIRTUAL IN-PERSON

## Donor Communication Preferences

### INDIVIDUALS

Email, in-person or mail



### CORPORATIONS

Email, in-person or virtual meeting



### FOUNDATIONS

Email or in-person meetings



### INDIVIDUAL DONORS

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"We are not motivated by recognition, so in most cases a thank you note or letter would suffice. However, if our giving was substantial or reached a certain threshold, then some sort of additional recognition might be expected in keeping with the organization’s protocol."

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"A thank you letter is more intentional and shows it's not just the 'check the box' workflow"

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"It matters more that there was a personal touch to the acknowledgment."

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"A personal note sent in the mail from an organization makes a donor feel more connected. Development is about cultivating relationships."

# Volunteerism & Philanthropy

The study also seeks to understand the correlation between volunteerism and philanthropy. Eighty-six percent of total respondents indicated that they do volunteer personal time for their preferred charitable organizations. This was consistent across all groups of donors with those on behalf of a corporation at 92%, individuals at 88%, and foundations at 60%.

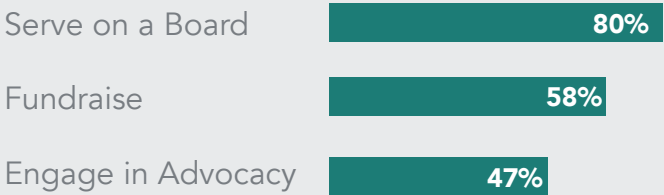
When asked how they like to volunteer their time, serving on a board for a nonprofit is universally preferred, however the preferences vary from there.

The data shows that while volunteering can have an impact on giving, it does not always result in an increased gift.

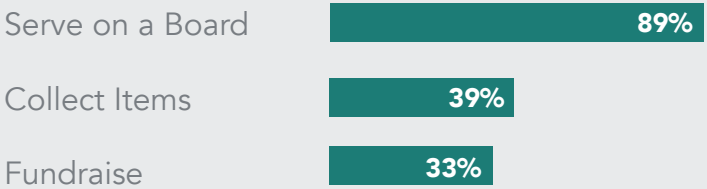
Fifty-two percent of individuals indicate volunteering increases their philanthropic giving to an organization while 47% said there is no impact. Likewise, 55% of corporations and foundations indicate an increase in giving correlated to volunteering, while 39% report it isn't a factor.

## How Donors Volunteer Their Time

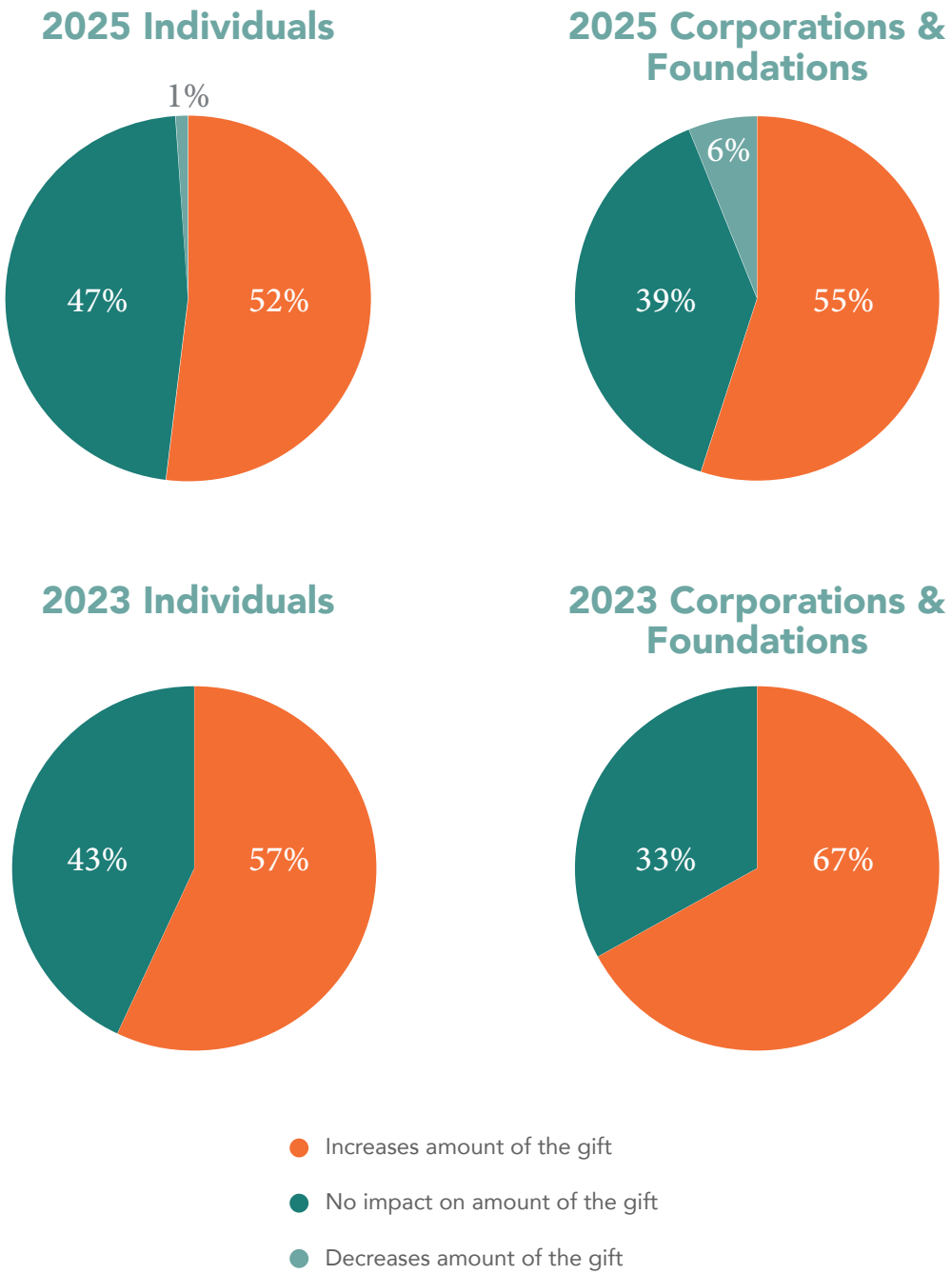
### INDIVIDUALS



### CORPORATIONS & FOUNDATIONS



## Impact of volunteering on financial gift





# Confidence in the Nonprofit Community

Donor confidence in the nonprofit sector is up from 2023, but not quite as high as the 2022 benchmark study.

Many comment on their confidence in the nonprofit sector's ability to serve the community, however, uncertainty lies in the financial support to maintain our nonprofit organizations. Donors cite factors such as the political climate, economic uncertainty, declines in public and corporate funding, and an aging/small donor pool as areas of concern.

/// "The fact that corporate giving has dropped and that Central Iowa's high net worth donors are aging gives me pause."  
– individual donor

/// "Going forward, I believe nonprofits will need to depend on more people to provide smaller gifts versus fewer donors with very large gifts."  
– individual donor

/// "The change in political climate has negatively impacted many philanthropic endeavors, so I feel like this is a tumultuous time for the metro nonprofit space."  
– individual donor

/// "The heaving lifting is being done by a few, including us."  
– individual donor

/// "Our nonprofits work well together and are supported in the community by corporations and individual donors. I think we're going to see some challenges with things going on federally and a lot of key leaders retiring. It will be a time of transition, but I believe our community will step up."  
– corporate donor

/// "The gap between stronger organizations and the more vulnerable is getting wider. As need increases and donors shift, we have to be mindful of a healthy ecosystem."  
– foundation donor

## Advice to the Nonprofit Sector

One of the biggest pieces of advice for the nonprofit sector continues to be to find ways to collaborate with other nonprofits and consolidate where possible. Donors sense there are too many nonprofits with similar missions competing for the same dollars. This was echoed across the board by individuals, corporations, and foundations.

/// "I believe politics and egos are the biggest barriers central Iowa nonprofits face. Unfortunately, it hinders overall impact."  
– corporate donor

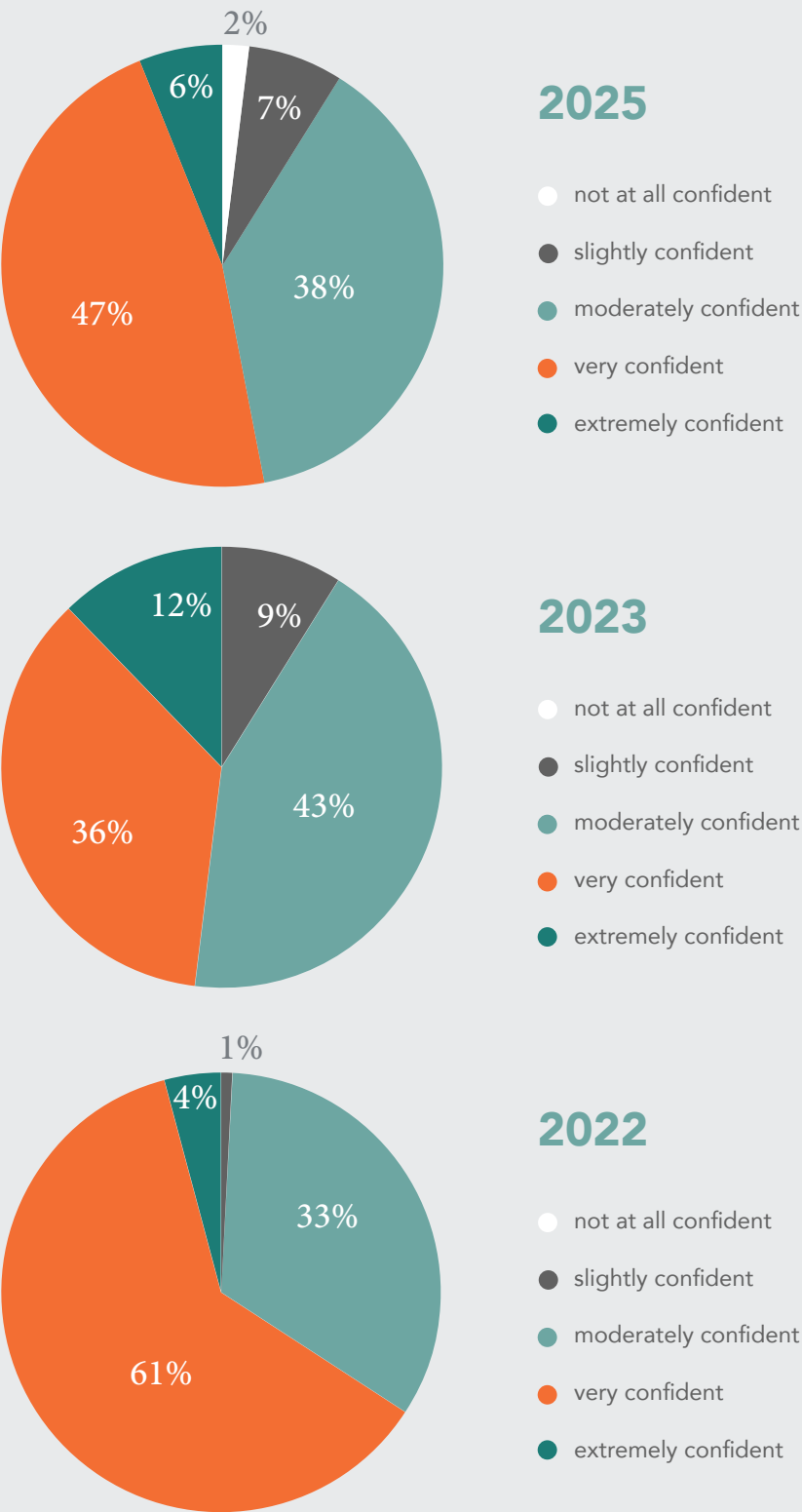
/// "Central Iowa's nonprofit community thrives when organizations recognize shared missions and lean into collaboration rather than competition. By identifying areas of overlap, whether in services, audiences, or goals, groups can pool resources, amplify impact, and build a stronger, more resilient network of support. Working together not only reduces duplication but also fosters innovation and deeper community trust."  
– corporate donor

/// "We have lots of overlap of missions of various nonprofits. We continue to have turf wars. The amount of time and resources spent on back-office services that could be done collectively is too high."  
– individual donor

/// "Figure out ways to work together and find deficiencies instead of fighting over the same dollars. There are too many resources wasted working against other nonprofits."  
– individual donor

/// "Continue to be resilient, but also be open to new work configurations - cross organizational staffing, shared service agreements, and potentially strategic mergers to sustain your mission."  
– corporate donor

## Shifts in Nonprofit Confidence



# What Donors are Saying



## INDIVIDUALS

“Cultivate new volunteers and leaders. The usual suspects grow weary of always being asked. Get more small business leaders involved.”

“Please don’t seek funding in the community unless your board members are 100% committed to your initiative with their own financial contributions.”

“Keep expanding your support base and encourage giving at all levels, especially young people who are not yet in a position to give in large figures.”

“Keep asking and being organized and keep thanking in a personal way.”

“Find a personal connection with donors.”

“Central Iowa is relationship driven. Donor engagement is imperative.”

“Communicate an ROI to financial supporters: what results were achieved from the financial support they received?”

“There is a lot of untapped wealth. It seems they all go back to the same well.”

“Continue to nurture relationships but older people are ready for the next generation to take the reins and that generation is going to need to step forward.”

## CORPORATE

“Celebrate the general operations donors more than specific event sponsors. Don’t underestimate partnerships.”

“Listen to the donors and identify their priorities. Find common ground with them before selling them.”

“Be realistic as to what your organization does well and if it has the data to prove that the community should continue to invest in its efforts.”

“Now is the time to look at efficiencies and meaningful collaborations. The days ahead

will require new, innovative and likely uncomfortable choices, but it could yield strong results if we tackle it thoughtfully now instead of waiting.”

## FOUNDATION

“Continue to focus on building relationships and education. Share the stories of how your efforts make a difference.”

“Continue partnering and working together to solve our key community issues and support essential needs.”



## DEMOGRAPHICS

94 total respondents completed the survey, a 46% response rate.

25-34 .....	1%
35-44 .....	12%
45-54 .....	15%
55-64 .....	21%
65+ .....	51%
Male.....	37%
Female.....	62%
Prefer not to share .....	1%

# About

## ISAACSON-SYVERSON CONSULTING



Isaacson-Syversen Consulting (ISC) is a nonprofit consulting firm committed to helping nonprofit organizations develop the resources needed to advance their missions. ISC provides counsel and guidance to strengthen annual giving, capital campaigns, special projects, and major donor programs. ISC also offers guidance related to strategic planning, volunteer engagement, relationship building, and board performance. [Isaacsonsyversenconsulting.com](http://Isaacsonsyversenconsulting.com)

Nikki Syversen – Principal  
Connie Isaacson – Of Counsel

3106 Ingersoll Ave,  
Des Moines, IA 50312

## COMPENDIUM INSIGHTS



Compendium Insights is a marketing research and insights consulting firm, focused on collaborating with clients to uncover answers and translate those discoveries into meaningful, actionable insights that make a difference. Compendium specializes in conducting custom research utilizing fresh and goal-oriented approaches, for local, regional, and national organizations. [Compendiumpartners.com](http://Compendiumpartners.com)

Lauren Holderness – Founder and Project Leader  
Erin Slater – Project Leader & Researcher  
Josh Holderness – Researcher & Business Development

Des Moines IA Office  
2323 Grand Ave, Suite 200  
Des Moines, IA 50312



