

The Center on Philanthropy & Public Policy

BECOMING A VENTURE PHILANTHROPIST: A Study of the Socialization of Social Venture Partners

Michael Moody

**Research Paper - 31
May 2009**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The research project reported here sought to help meet the need for better understanding of donor education and learning, a need which is increasing with the emergence of more engaged, strategic donors and new giving vehicles. There is little scholarly work on these processes of “donor socialization,” which include both formal donor training and experiential means of immersing donors into the culture of an institution, thereby helping to sustain the institution while also helping donors become more effective philanthropists.

This multi-method research project examined donor socialization in Social Venture Partners International (SVPI) by gathering survey and interview data from individuals who became “partners” in local “SVP” affiliates of SVPI, as well as document and observational data on SVPI’s much imitated methods of donor development. The project set out to investigate both what SVP partners learn and how they learn it, to address questions about the content, process, and impact of socialization on these donors, and to derive best practice recommendations for the field of donor education and development.

The results provided strong evidence that involvement with SVP has the intended effects on individual partners. Nearly all partners—97.7%—reported that they had learned something significant since joining SVP, while 70.9% said their amount of giving increased, and 86.3% said they changed how they give. Partners indicated that their involvement with SVP was a factor—often a “significant” or “primary” factor—determining these changes in how much they give, how they give, and what they have learned. That is, SVP socialization has an impact on partners’ giving behavior, practices, and knowledge. Moreover, the influence of SVP appears to become more pronounced both as partners become involved in more SVP activities and as they serve as partners for a longer time.

The impact of SVP socialization is perhaps most clearly seen in changes in how partners give. Partners were asked in the survey about 12 characteristics of “strategic philanthropy”—all aspects of the approach to giving promoted by SVP—and whether they practiced this in their giving since joining SVP and before joining. For every one of the 12, there was an increase in the number partners (often more than twice as many) saying they practiced it after joining. Also, giving practices that were highly emphasized in the SVP training curriculum and other materials—e.g., a focus on results, giving for capacity-building, and writing fewer but larger checks—were the practices showing the biggest increases and cited the most in interviews.

Partners reported learning many things as a result of involvement with SVP, but especially knowledge about social issues, their local community, and nonprofit organizations and the nonprofit sector in general. In interviews, partners noted that they came to appreciate the importance of supporting capacity-building in nonprofit investees, but many also acknowledged

the challenge of “translation” they confronted as business-minded professionals trying to learn how things work in the nonprofit world.

This project also provided useful insight into the different specific socialization processes that SVP partners go through, and which part of the process partners considered most transformative. Various data showed consistently that both formal donor education processes and experiential donor engagement processes played an influential role. But the interactive learning venues were considered the most impactful, and this was the case for every partner outcome measured—how they give, how much, and what they learned. Partner education events were especially helpful in providing factual knowledge, while the range of experiential processes allowed partners to “exercise” their knowledge and skills in ways that made the learning stick, kept them engaged, and allowed for peer-to-peer learning. Two of the hands-on SVP activities—serving on a grant or investment committee, and volunteering with an investee—were identified repeatedly as the peak socialization experiences for partners. Serving on a grant committee—often the first major form of involvement for all new partners—was consistently singled out in interviews as the most “indispensible” part of the partner development experience.

There appeared to be a common learning curve for each partner going through SVP socialization processes. This begins with crucial engagement in the first-year and continues with learning derived from varied experiences, but the process explicitly has “no finish line.” There is some evidence of identifiable stages of partner philanthropic development, and SVP affiliates are now trying to specify and support those stages in the partner “life cycle.” However, the findings here also suggested the importance of an individualized path that takes into account where a donor is coming from and, especially, their extent of involvement. “Mileage varies” for each individual partner because “you get out of it what you put into it,” and engagement and learning reinforce one another over time. Finally, SVP socialization was found to be an important influence on partners even when explicitly compared to other life experiences and influences.

These results confirm earlier findings about SVP’s impact on partners, but do so with more geographically diverse data and with some more depth of explanation provided by interviews. This study of a successful and often imitated model of donor education and learning can also help improve the still evolving field of donor development and advisement. Best practices recommendations derived from this study include:

- Create more experiential, interactive venues for learning.
- Provide ample opportunities for both intense and sustained involvement, but allow for individualization.
- Help donors that have little experience in the nonprofit sector with the translation process.
- Encourage and provide opportunities for peer-to-peer learning among donors.
- Learn about and complement where donors are coming from.

BECOMING A VENTURE PHILANTHROPIST: A Study of the Socialization of Social Venture Partners¹

INTRODUCTION

Understanding the process of donor education and learning has never been more important than it is right now. Despite the recent economic downturn, in the past couple decades there has been a significant increase in the number of high net worth individuals seeking professional assistance with their giving (Schervish, 2000), and growing numbers of donors of all sorts deliberately looking to give in engaged, strategic ways (Grace and Wendroff, 2001). It is no coincidence that this rise in new donors has paralleled the well-documented development of new vehicles and means for giving such as giving circles, “venture philanthropy” techniques, and donor advised funds (Bearman, 2007; Bernholz, 2001; Eikenberry and Bearman, 2009; Moody, 2008, 2006; Morino and Shore, 2004). Of course, these new methods of giving often require more intensive donor education because of their increased level of donor engagement and their use of new giving and evaluation methods.

However, the practitioners of donor education who must try to meet this new demand for donor learning acknowledge that their field and their practices are not well developed or widely understood. As Siegel and Yancey (2003) point out, “The emerging field of donor education is in its infancy... [It] has more questions than answers. There is a lack of common language, no codified bank of knowledge...or widely accepted frameworks” (p. 13). Similarly, there is very little scholarly work on the broader process of what can be called “donor socialization,” a process that includes both formal donor training and other, informal, experiential means of learning and acculturation that people go through as they become donors of a particular sort.

For these reasons, further research that improves our understanding of donor socialization—especially donor socialization into ostensibly “new” approaches to philanthropy—is vitally important to both scholars and practitioners. The multi-method research project reported in this paper seeks to meet this need by examining donor socialization in a philanthropic organization, Social Venture Partners International (SVPI), that is widely acknowledged to be an innovator both in the practice of donor education and in a new method of giving. The project gathered data on the individuals who become “partners” in local affiliates of SVPI (each affiliate is an “SVP”), along with data on SVPI’s explicit donor training methods and the other processes of donor socialization. The analysis investigates what partners learn, and how they learn it. In addition, it also seeks to identify the impacts and the challenges of the learning process.

¹ Special thanks to the staff of SVPI and of local SVP affiliates for their invaluable assistance with this survey, especially to Ruth Jones, Rona Pryor, Paul Shoemaker, Aaron Jacobs, and Sofia Michelakis. Thanks also to Jim Ferris for support and guidance throughout the project, and to Andrea Ilouljian and Amna Imam for assistance with data analysis.

DONOR SOCIALIZATION

Social scientists now take it for granted that socialization—the lifelong process of individuals learning the ways of society and becoming a member of specific cultures—is a routine mechanism that makes social life possible. Unfortunately, socialization itself is not often an explicit topic for new research, despite many unanswered questions, especially about adult socialization. Still, there are some well-established general findings (see Grusec and Hastings, 2006) that can inform the current research. These include:

- Socialization at several life stages and by multiple “agents” of socialization shapes individuals in many ways. It is essential for inculcating culture, such as shared ways of thinking and expressing—e.g., concepts, beliefs, lingo—and normal or acceptable ways of acting or engaging in a shared practice.
- Both formal and informal socialization are important. Informal socialization is often called “social learning” or “experiential learning,” in which socialization occurs through interaction, observation, and modeling.
- Both primary socialization (in childhood, often by family) and secondary socialization (in later life stages, often to learn various professional or organizational cultures) are significant steps in social development.

Most studies of donors focus on how much they give, their motives or stated reasons for giving, or their giving strategies (e.g., Hodgkinson, et al., 2003; Ostrower, 1997). While essential, these studies too often neglect the question of how donors learn to give—and to give in a new or distinctive way—and questions about how donors are socialized into philanthropic culture, or into the culture of a philanthropic organization. Research on donors, including studies of wealthy or “high-tech” donors that are attracted to new vehicles like SVP (e.g., Schervish, et al., 2001), has suggested the importance of a cultivated sense of identification of donors with the organization, or the “associational capital” (Schervish and Havens, 1997) they develop between them. But little research has been conducted on the dynamic process of developing these identifications and connections. Individual case studies of venture philanthropists or social entrepreneurs (e.g., Bornstein, 2004; Van Slyke and Newman, 2006) are helpful, but more systematic research on the specific process, content, and impact of donor socialization is necessary.

There is some limited previous research on donor education that begins to get at these issues. Important surveys of the state of the field and studies of best practices in donor education (Backer, 2006; Bernholz, 2001; Remmer, 2000; Seigel and Yancey, 2003) summarize some of what we know about how donors learn, and how they learn best. These studies counteract the common misperceptions that new donors are a blank slate and that they will resist or avoid learning. Instead, the studies find that donors are eager to learn, if done in the right way, and that donors’ responses to acculturation into a new giving environment depend on where they are in their lives, their existing cultural orientations, and their previous experiences with giving (Stone and McElwee, 2004). Research on donor education also finds that the informal and experiential means of learning—through interaction, observation, personal engagement—are often more

effective than more formal training and advisement. In fact, this emphasis on engagement with peers and building close relationships is one of the reasons why giving circles and other collaborative approaches to giving, like Social Venture Partners, are often touted as effective and attractive to new donors (Bearman, 2007; Eikenberry, 2006). Studies also find that donors learn diverse content—from techniques to facts to new ways of talking about their giving—although the question remains how they learn what parts of this diverse list. Most important, prior research on donor education and learning finds that the socialization process matters for both donors’ attitudes and their giving behavior, especially in engaged settings such as giving circles (Eikenberry and Bearman, 2009). Socialization can effectively immerse donors into the culture of a particular institution or giving community, and thereby help sustain it. But again, more research is needed on how this happens and to what extent.

Donor Socialization in SVP Affiliates

Social Venture Partners (SVP) began in Seattle in 1997 and the model developed there has since been replicated in 25 affiliate organizations, involving over 1,800 individual partners (at the time of the beginning of this research), in cities across the U.S. and Canada, as well as a new affiliate in Japan (Brainerd, 1999; Sbarbaro, 2000). These affiliates are members of a federated organization, SVPI, also based in Seattle, that supports the network of affiliates and oversees start-ups seeking to import the successful SVP model to a new city. This unique model combines aspects of a giving circle, a venture philanthropy grantmaker, and a volunteer coordinating organization. The model emphasizes collective and collaborative decision-making, close engagement by partners, and extensive, varied, and sustained donor education. Partners not only give money to a pooled fund, but also have several opportunities for personal involvement. Partners can serve on a grant or “investment” committee to help decide how to distribute the pooled money to nonprofit “investees” (or on various other internal committees). Partners are also encouraged to provide hands-on assistance to the investees by serving as volunteers, or otherwise working to build the recipient organization’s capacity. There are also numerous partner education seminars and other events, as well as more indirect forms of knowledge dissemination, learning, and networking.

SVP affiliates are a particularly good subject for a study of donor socialization. The most important reason for this is because they have made donor socialization a central part of their mission, and have been particularly reflective over the years about how they develop partners. As the SVP model evolved and spread, proponents came to embrace what they now call a “dual mission” of supporting effective nonprofits **and** developing lifelong philanthropic leaders. Put another way, the goal of SVP is to build the capacity of both their nonprofit investees and their partners. In the second part of that dual mission, SVP seeks to create philanthropic leaders who deliberately and reflectively practice engaged, strategic, “intentional” philanthropy (SVP Seattle, 2007), both in their work in SVP and in their other individual and family philanthropic activities. The approach to giving that SVP affiliates practice, then, is a model for individual partners to follow in their own giving.

SVP is a good subject to study, also, because the affiliates have developed a diverse educational curriculum (including standard ways to train partners in the SVP approach), and

have evolved a model for “philanthropy development” of partners which includes numerous opportunities for experiential or social learning—or informal socialization—to occur (see Jacobs, 2006; SVP Seattle, 2007, 2005). The curriculum and the model are still works-in-progress, and are still being formalized in terms of learning goals for each piece and intended areas of competency. And each partner is still invited to take an “individualized” path to some extent. But the process of what I’m calling donor socialization is more clearly understood, specified, and prioritized in SVP than in almost any other philanthropic organization. In fact, the SVP approach has become a model for donor training in other organizations and by donor education professionals (Bernholz, 2001; Moody, 2008), which is another good reason to study it closely. Finally, SVP is an ideal subject for this research because they have employed their approach to partner development in diverse local settings, and because the population of partners involved in the range of affiliate cities is large.

There have been a few previous studies of Social Venture Partners, conducted by outside evaluators and internally by SVP staff, that focused mainly on the impacts of SVP affiliates’ carefully constructed partner education and development efforts (Guthrie, et al., 2003; Jacobs, 2006; Kahn, 2007; SVP Seattle 2005). Previous surveys of partners, and some interviews, have found significant effects of SVP engagement on these donors, specifically that partners use more strategic and engaged methods in their giving, and that partners build networks and relationships in the local nonprofit sector. A portion of this previous research also looked at what SVP partners learned, and the process of learning from the partners’ point of view. Partners reported learning a range of things, from a distinctive “venture” approach to grantmaking to enhanced “knowledge of community issues and nonprofit culture” (Guthrie, et al., 2003, p.3), to technical knowledge about grantmaking and evaluation. Partners also reported enhanced self-knowledge and a fuller sense of their own identity as philanthropists. Further, previous work found that experiential learning—especially through engagement with the nonprofit investees and work on SVP grant committees—was considered to have the most transformative effect, more so than the formal partner training. These previous studies of SVP provide essential guidance for the current study, but they were conducted for different purposes, with somewhat different research questions. They were also conducted primarily on the original and largest affiliate, SVP Seattle. A key purpose of the current study will be to see whether similar findings emerge from data on multiple other SVP affiliates, including many whose partner base is different from technology-heavy Seattle.

It is also important to note that while there is a growing body of research about “new” models of giving, such as giving circles and venture philanthropy, this research has focused mostly on the rise of the new vehicles and on their distinctive new content (e.g., Eikenberry, 2006; Frumkin, 2003; James and Marshall, 2006; Letts, et al., 1997; Standlee, 2006). There has been little work on the donors who use these new vehicles, or on the processes by which these organizations and giving networks reproduce their distinctive approach. In my own previous research on the field of venture philanthropy (Moody 2008, 2006), I found that it was explicitly constructed in a way that would appeal to emerging new donors who were comfortable with the venture capital model, and who wanted a more engaged means of giving. In the current study, I focus on these donors, looking at what happens after they are attracted to this type of giving.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research project reported in this paper was designed to address some crucial but neglected questions about donor socialization, using multiple methods and a diverse group of donors. Specifically, the project addresses three primary research questions:

- **Content:** What do SVP partners learn during their socialization into this philanthropic culture?
- **Process:** What are the patterns in, influences on, and challenges during the SVP socialization process?
- **Impact:** What impacts does socialization have on the partners, both in terms of how they think about their giving and their actual giving behavior?

In short, this examination of the socialization of SVP partners investigates what partners learn, how they learn it, and what difference this makes for their giving. It analyzes both the means of socialization—the agents, the processes, the venues, etc.—and the ends of socialization—what was learned, what impact learning had, etc. The project identifies the factual knowledge and self-knowledge that partners gain, as well as the skills, concepts, and practices they learn as they are immersed in the distinctive philanthropic culture of the SVP model. The research delves into both formal and informal socialization processes in SVPs, identifies the roles and influences of various socializing agents, and asks partners from whom they learned what, from whom they learned the most and least, what difficulties they confronted, and so on. And this project looks for possible impacts in terms of both behavioral and attitudinal changes, and tries to discern how much of these changes can be attributed to the partners' involvement in SVP. Finally, because of the distinctive nature of SVP as an intentionally new approach to grantmaking, this study of SVPs provides particular insight into how donors learn to give in this more strategic way.

The findings from this research project will be useful to a variety of practitioners as well as informative to scholars. Through this study of a well-known and widely imitated model of donor development, this project will distill a set of best practices for educating and engaging donors that can guide practitioners of various sorts, particularly those philanthropic organizations and advisors working with donors interested in new forms of giving.

DATA AND METHODS

Working closely with the staff of SVPI, this research project employs a multi-method design to gather data from a large-scale online survey of partners, in-depth interviews with partners and SVP staff, observations of affiliate activities, and documents. This variety of data provides insight into donor socialization from the point of view of both the individual partner (which is the primary focus) and the SVP organization.

This multi-method design seeks to provide the information necessary to address each of the three research questions, as outlined below:

Research Question	Data
<u>Content</u> : What do SVP partners learn during their socialization into this philanthropic culture?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partner survey responses - Partner and staff interviews - Documents on partner training
<u>Process</u> : What are the patterns in, influences on, and challenges during the SVP socialization process?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partner and staff interviews - Observations - Documents
<u>Impact</u> : What impacts does socialization have on the partners, both in terms of how they think about their giving and their actual giving behavior?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partner survey responses - Partner interviews

This study analyzes this data with an eye to identifying comparative differences among communities, across partners with different levels and types of involvement, and across other potentially relevant differences among the partners. Geographic diversity in the sample was a particular priority, because different communities are distinctive in ways which might affect how their donor base practices this form of giving—i.e., in their local industry concentrations, the professional backgrounds of the donor base, and the salient problems or issue orientation of the particular SVP affiliate. Each source of data gathered for the full research project is described in detail below.

Data Sources

The primary data for this project comes from a web-based survey of SVP partners that are involved with affiliates throughout the U.S. and Canada. The survey was administered through SurveyMonkey.com from February through April, 2008, and responses were anonymous. Previous surveys of SVP partners—conducted as part of SVPI’s “Demonstrating SVP’s Impact” (DSI) program (Kahn, 2007; SVP Seattle 2005), and earlier by Blueprint Research & Design (Guthrie, et al., 2003)—provided useful guidance (see above) but were limited to a few affiliates or to SVP Seattle alone. The survey for the current project posed some similar questions—addressing those questions to a broader range of affiliates—but also included several new questions specific to the analytical focus of this current project. Analysis of the survey responses included some cross-tabulations of responses to two questions, primarily to check for the potential comparative patterns described earlier—e.g., across partners with different lengths and types of involvement, across different affiliate cities, and so on.

The survey instrument was developed through consultation with SVPI staff, a review of previous research, and pilot interviews with several SVP partners conducted in fall of 2007. The survey collects potentially relevant background information on the partners, as well as information on their involvement with SVP and with other forms of philanthropy. This is followed by the primary questions about how much and how partners give, as well as what they have learned as a partner. Partners are asked to identify how much influence their involvement

with SVP has had on each of these, and which aspect of their involvement with SVP—e.g., attending partner education events, volunteering with investees, meeting other partners, working on SVP committees, etc.—has had an impact. The survey also included open-ended questions to get partners' ideas and practical suggestions for how SVP affiliates can improve their donor development activities.

While the survey findings are the primary data in this project, addressing the research questions in depth requires additional qualitative data. In particular, the study needed data that could get at the dynamic processes of learning and could explore in closer detail individual trajectories or explanations for the observed impacts of SVP involvement. The most useful source of this additional data were semi-structured interviews with partners from multiple affiliates, as well as interviews with SVP staff and long-time proponents. A total of 18 partners and staff were interviewed. Interviews were between 45 minutes to 2 hours, and most were conducted in-person (a few were by phone). Interviewees were guaranteed anonymity, including not quoting them by name or identifying their affiliate membership.

The interviews covered many similar topics to the survey, but also addressed the research questions about the process of partner socialization—e.g., what partners reported learning from different components of the SVP experience and which was most influential, what the obstacles or challenges were during the process, and how their learning curve changed over time. Interviewees also were given hypothetical situations to reflect on, such as what they would change if they were put in charge of developing new partners, or how they would describe to a potential recruit what is most unique or surprising about becoming a partner.

Additional information was gleaned from observations of SVP partner training and orientation sessions, informal peer interactions, and other donor socialization processes were made during site visits to individual SVP affiliates, as well as during two annual conferences of Social Venture Partners International. Observation data revealed the more subtle, experiential aspects of the socialization process. Also, documentary data was gathered from both the national SVPI office and local SVP affiliates, via the web, by mail, and in person during research visits. Documents pertaining to the partner education strategy and variations of the training curriculum were of particular interest, as were documents providing historical information on the creation and evolution of SVP's partner development approach.

The Sample

A total of 175 usable responses to the survey were received. The survey invitation was distributed electronically to partners through the SVPI staff network, so that local staff could send the invitation to partners in their local affiliates, encouraging their participation while also communicating the full support of central SVPI leaders. Because of this, it is not possible to know precisely how many of the over 1,800 individual partners actually received the invitation, but it can be reasonably estimated that around 1,000 partners received it, even if merely as part of a mass email notice. So we can estimate a response rate of between 10-20%.

The appendix provides a number of additional tables and figures with demographic and other background information about the SVP partners who responded to the survey. The survey asked partners both about their involvement with their local SVP affiliate and their other philanthropic activities outside of SVP. The sample of responding partners includes a considerable number of new partners—33.7% have been partners for 2 years or less—as well as about the same number of long-term partners—35.4% have been partners for over 5 years, which is longer than many of the affiliates have been in existence (Table A-1 in the Appendix). The responding partners hailed from 14 of the 25 total SVPI affiliates, with almost a third hailing from Seattle and a majority of respondents from the largest SVP affiliates—in Seattle, Dallas, Arizona, San Diego, and Cleveland (Table A-2).

Most survey respondents are active SVP partners, attending at least one donor education event per year as well as serving on SVP committees and volunteering for investees—with many individual partners reporting multiple forms of involvement (Table A-3). Only 8% reported the minimum level of involvement: making their annual monetary contribution to the pooled investment fund of their SVP affiliate. Nearly all of the partners are also active as donors (95.4%) and volunteers (76%) to other organizations and causes, and less than 1% report no other philanthropic involvement outside of SVP (Table A-4). This is not surprising, but it also suggests that partners potentially have other sources of learning and donor education.²

As a whole, the partners are a relatively well-educated group, with over 95% having at least one college degree and over half with a graduate degree as well (Table A-5).³ About 18% work in the field of finance, accounting, and banking, but beyond that their occupational fields are very diverse, including many who work in the nonprofit sector or as volunteers (Table A-6). They are also an affluent population, with over half earning more than \$250,000 per year in income (Figure A-1), and only 16% reporting net worth of one million dollars or below (Figure A-2). It is not surprising, then, that SVP partners report high levels of annual philanthropic giving, including a great deal of giving beyond their SVP donation. Over a quarter of the sample gave more than \$50,000 last year, while a mere 7% gave only the required contribution to their SVP affiliate, which is \$5,000 in most affiliates (Figure A-3).

In addition to the survey sample, a total of 15 partners and 5 staff members (2 of which were also partners) were interviewed over the course of the research. Of the interviewees, 12 were men and 8 women. The partners interviewed had been involved with their SVP affiliates for between 2 and 10 years, but on average they were more experienced with SVP than the average partner. The partners interviewed were involved in 5 different affiliates from around the U.S.

² Of the 175 respondents, 91 indicated that another adult in their household was involved with SVP, while 84 were the only adult involved. So some of the respondents likely reside in the same household, but completed the survey as individuals.

³ Any differences from the overall N=175 in any of the tables in this report indicate that some respondents did not answer a particular question, or were skipped past the question deliberately based on a previous answer.

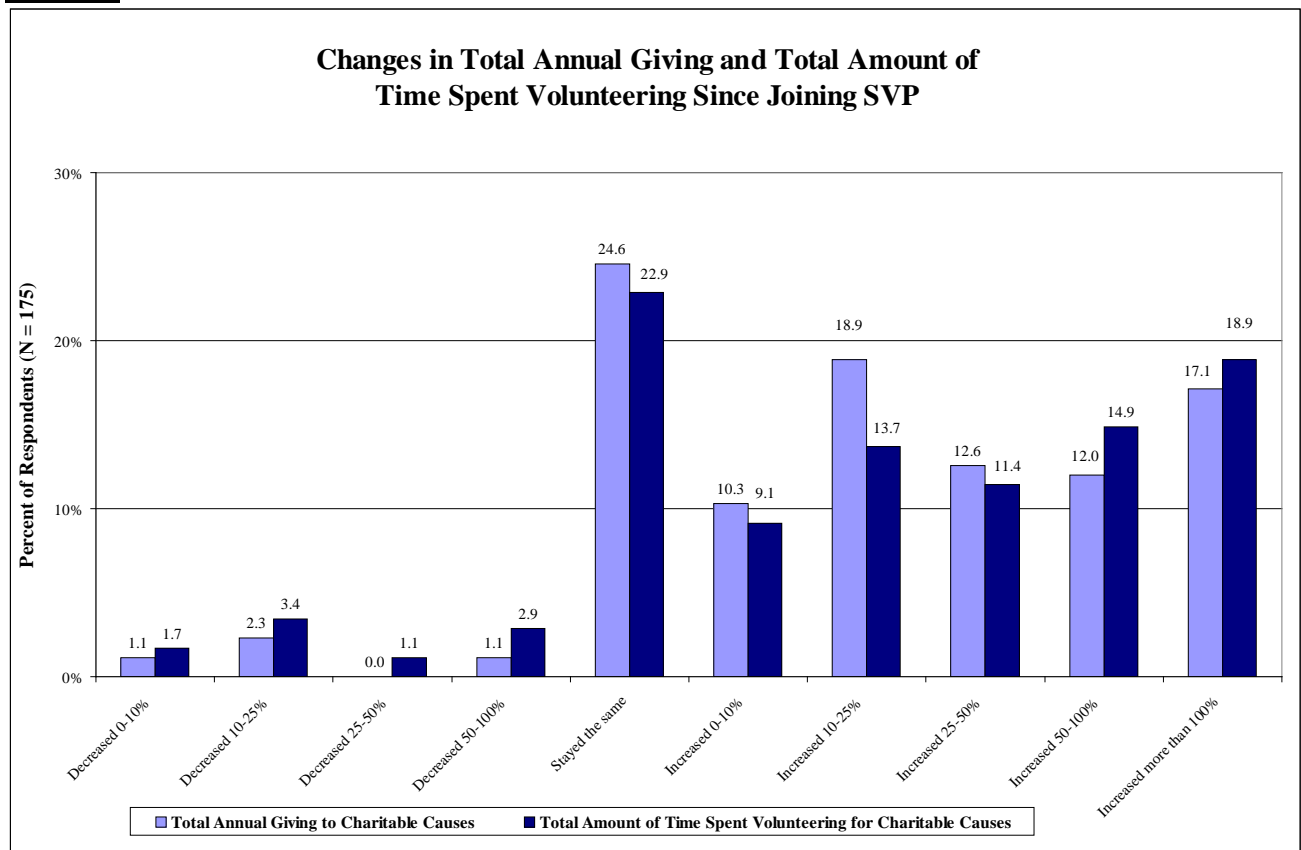
IMPACTS ON GIVING AND LEARNING

The survey and interviews asked SVP partners about changes in their giving behavior, strategies, and knowledge—how much they give, how they give, and what they learned—as well as asking how their involvement in SVP impacted this behavior, strategy, and knowledge. The next few sections deal with these core set of concerns, addressing first here the question of the influence of SVP on how much partners give (and the related issue of how much they volunteered).

How Much Partners Give

Figure 1 below provides evidence that involvement with SVP has a positive effect on how much partners give and volunteer. Most (70.9%) of respondents said their charitable giving (to all causes) increased after joining SVP, and 68% said this about their amount of volunteering. Only 4.6% and 9.1% said their giving and volunteering decreased, respectively. Moreover, a considerable number of partners said their levels of giving and volunteering increased dramatically after joining SVP. Roughly a third said their level of giving and volunteering rose by 50% or more, and more than half of those said the levels rose by over 100%.

Figure 1:



However, the changes reported in how much partners give and volunteer since joining SVP could be caused by a range of other factors besides their involvement with SVP. To get at this issue, the survey asked respondents to indicate the extent to which their involvement in SVP impacted their reported changes in giving (these questions were just asked about how much they gave, not volunteered).⁴ Overall, 78.3% of the sample reported some change (up or down) in how much they gave. Over half (50.4%) of these partners who reported a change indicated that SVP was either “a significant” or “the primary” factor influencing that change (Figure A-4 in the Appendix). Only 13.9% said SVP had no impact on the change.

One explanation for why SVP was, for many partners, a key factor leading them to give more emerges from the interview findings and the responses to open-ended survey questions. Partners said SVP made them feel more “empowered” and “confident” in their giving, and that led them to give more. As one partner put it, “Part of my increased giving has been due to increased knowledge of how to give and self-confidence that came from applying the SVP process on my own beyond SVP.” Another noted that SVP “expanded my horizons so that I no longer expect opportunities to give to my community to always find me, but I feel equipped to find them.” Other partners noted that SVP provided opportunities for them to volunteer more, and this in turn led to more giving.

While cross-tabulation analysis of survey results confirmed these general findings, it also revealed a notable difference for the biggest givers in the sample—those who gave \$50,000 a year or more to all causes. This group of partners had the highest percent of people reporting an increase of 100% or more in their giving level since joining SVP, and none of these largest donors said that SVP has been the primary factor in determining how much they give. A likely reason for this difference for the largest givers is that a change in their capacity to give, such as a significant increase in wealth, was the primary cause of their increased giving amounts. This was confirmed by some comments in interviews and open-ended survey responses. However, many of these biggest givers still acknowledged that SVP had “significant” or “some” influence.

How Partners Give

This research was also interested in SVP’s effect on how partners give, not just how much. In particular, the project examined whether individual partners practiced “strategic philanthropy,” in the way that “new philanthropy” models like SVP promote. To measure this in the survey, a list of 12 characteristics of strategic philanthropy was developed. This list is meant to capture the elements of the “venture” grantmaking approach that SVP practices—and that they teach to partners. The list was adapted in part from a previous list used by SVPI and other researchers studying SVP Seattle, but also incorporated other facets of strategic giving discussed in the growing literature on strategic, venture, high engagement philanthropy. The 12 characteristics are described in Table 1 below just as they appeared in the survey.

⁴ Note that these questions about impact were asked about changes in how much they gave. If a respondent reported no change in giving, they are not asked these questions. The same is true for similar questions later related to changes in how they give, and what they learned. Also, there was a small increase in the percent reporting a change in their giving amount in this set of questions versus the earlier question reported in Figure 1.

Table 1: Characteristics of Strategic Philanthropy

Proactive & mission-driven	Your philanthropy seeks to advance your established giving goals or theory of change.
Research-based	You conduct due diligence and make use of research (on needs, issues, approaches) when deciding which organizations to fund.
Long-term	You make multi-year gifts or commitments, &/or focus your giving on sustainable solutions.
Engaged	You prefer to work closely with the groups you support, giving time and expertise as well as money.
Results-oriented	You seek information about a nonprofit's performance and effectiveness in achieving outcomes when making a funding decision.
Entrepreneurial	You prefer to fund nonprofits attempting new, innovative approaches or taking greater risks.
Fewer, larger checks	You prefer to make fewer gifts of greater value each year, instead of smaller gifts to more organizations.
Supports capacity-building	You fund nonprofit infrastructure (staff and systems), not just programs, and you try to build organizational capacity.
Seeks systemic/policy change	You look to fund efforts that address root causes, attempt systemic solutions, or advocate for policy change.
Formal measurements	You use documented criteria and tangible measures to assess potential grants or to evaluate the impact of existing grants.
Collaborative	You solicit input from and collaborate with others to make better informed giving decisions.
Power- and culture-conscious	You consider how power dynamics and cultural differences can affect philanthropy's effectiveness.

For each of these characteristics, partners responding to the survey were asked whether they regularly practiced the characteristic in their personal grantmaking (not just in their giving through SVP) before joining SVP and after joining. As Figures 2 and 3 below indicate, **every** single characteristic of strategic philanthropy showed an increase in how many partners practiced it since joining SVP. For 8 out of the 12 characteristics, there were more than twice as many SVP partners who said they practiced that aspect of strategic philanthropy since joining SVP than said they already practiced it before joining. This is strong evidence that SVP involvement changed how these donors think about and deliberately approach their giving, both to SVP and to other causes.

Among the most commonly reported characteristics practiced by these partners since joining SVP are being results-oriented, supporting capacity-building, and giving in an explicitly engaged way. As shown in Figure 3, the first two of these were the characteristics that showed the largest difference between “percent before” SVP and “percent since”—a good indicator of the impact of SVP—followed by writing fewer but larger checks, and giving in a collaborative way. While some aspects of strategic philanthropy—e.g., making long-term commitments, and attending to power and cultural differences—showed smaller increases, even for these elements a considerably larger number of partners reported practicing them since joining SVP versus before.

Figure 2:

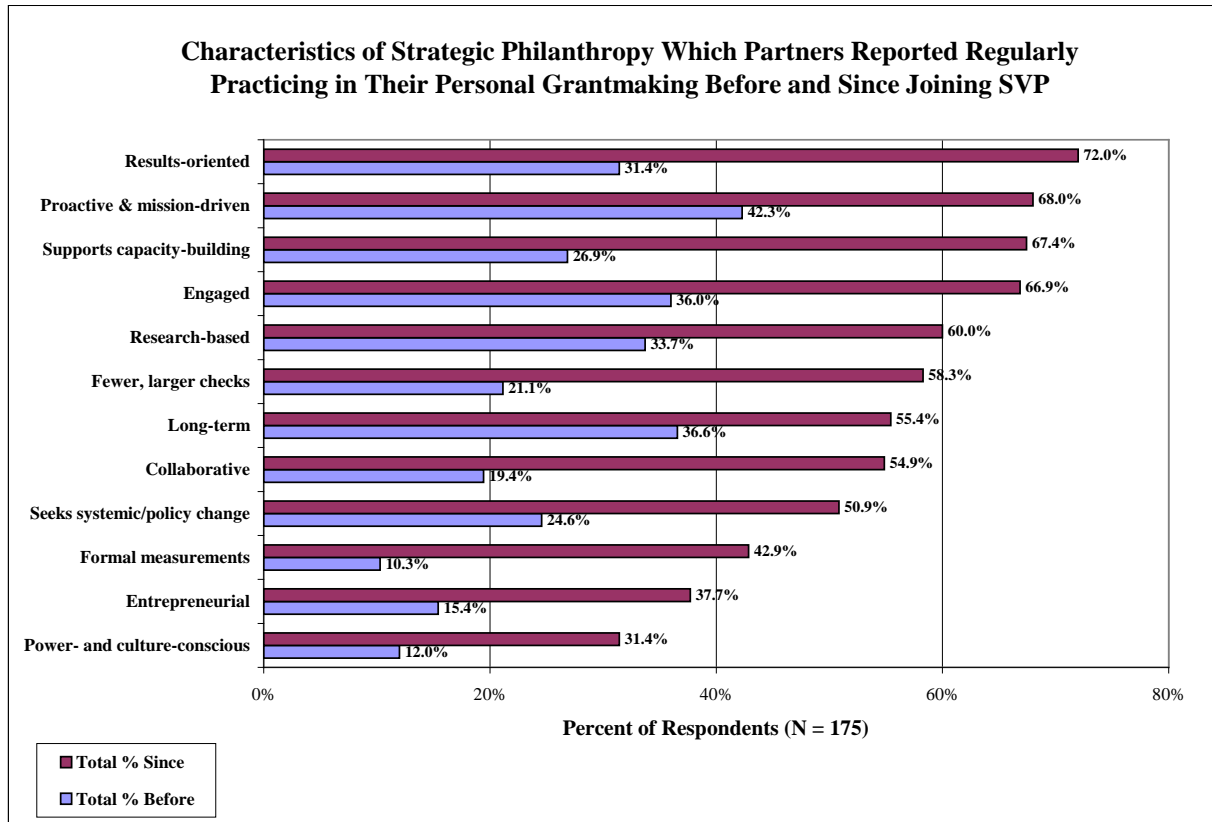
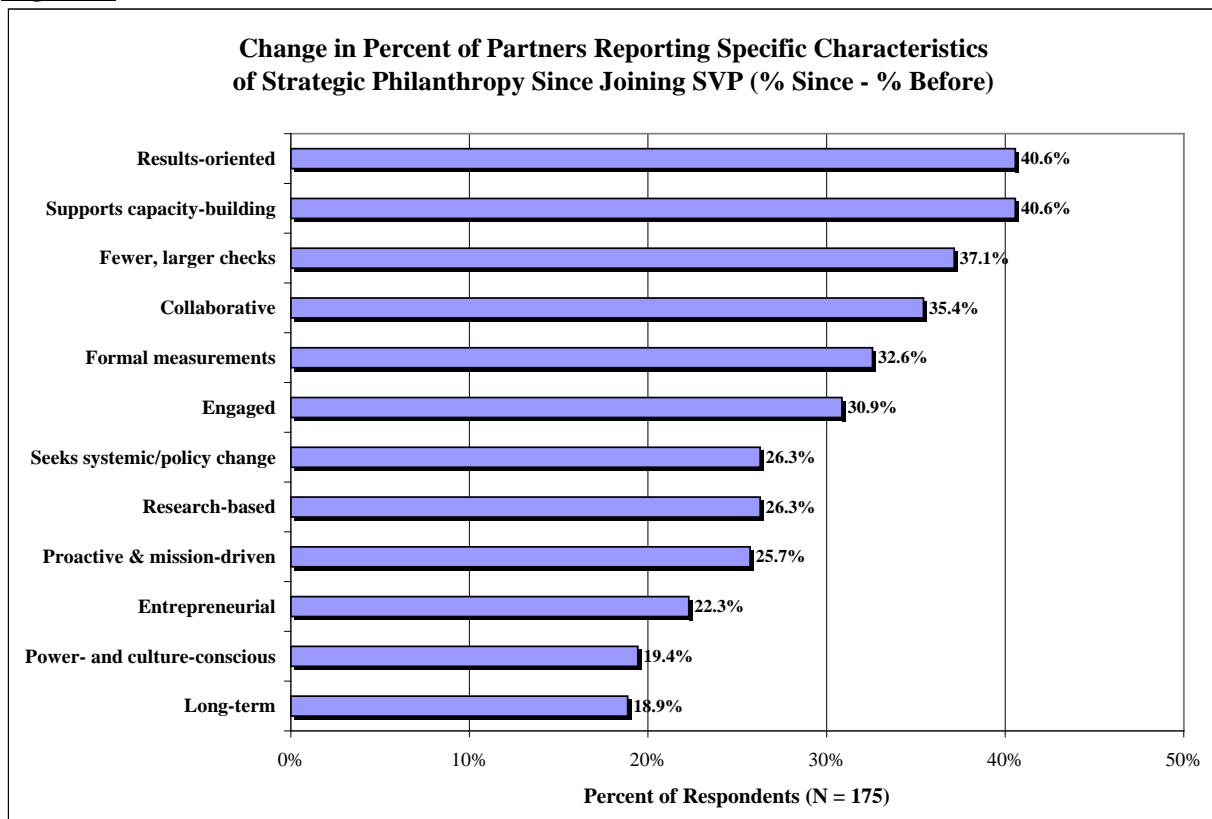


Figure 3:



These findings suggest that the deliberate work of SVP affiliates to inculcate partners in the explicit SVP model of strategic, “venture” giving does have a marked effect on these donors. This socialization is particularly effective regarding what might be the most distinctive elements of the SVP model. Being results-oriented, supporting capacity-building among the recipients of giving, writing fewer but larger checks, and giving collaboratively, are primary elements of the SVP grantmaking approach practiced by each affiliate. In fact, these four elements were dominant themes found in the analysis of documentary data for this project, such as the summary of the SVP model given to new partners and descriptions in annual reports. The emphasis on these as primary themes was also confirmed in staff interviews.

However, even though there is apparent evidence of an SVP impact on partners’ giving strategies in these before-after differences, it is important to investigate more directly how much of these changes can be attributed to their involvement with SVP. The survey findings indicate that SVP had an even greater impact on how respondents gave than on how much. A higher percent (86.3%) of partners reported some sort of change in how they gave than had reported a change in how much they gave (78.3%). And an even greater percent of the partners (58.4%) said that involvement in SVP was “a significant” or “the primary” factor influencing the change in their giving strategies (Figure A-5 in the Appendix). Only 5.3% said SVP was not a factor in their change.

The interviews and open-ended survey responses provided further support for the finding that partners’ approach to giving is directly influenced by their involvement with SVP. Many interviewees gave impassioned statements when asked if SVP had affected how they give. One said his method of giving “was profoundly shaped, and I’m very happy about that.” Another was more dramatic: “Second only to becoming a parent, my involvement with SVP has been the single most influential activity in my personal growth in the past 10 years.” For him, SVP changed not simply how he gives, but also how he thought about himself, and specifically about himself as a donor.

This sentiment was echoed by others who provided stories about “coming of age” as a donor through their involvement in SVP, about “feeling more comfortable as a philanthropist.” Before SVP, these partners said, they had little understanding of giving and certainly no deliberate strategy or careful way of thinking through their giving. After being involved with SVP for a while, they were more “intentional” in their giving, and this changed how they gave to all causes. As one partner explained, “My giving has changed from ‘giving charitably’ to ‘investing philanthropically.’ It’s important for me to know how my money is being spent, who is spending it, what it will be used for, and will it make an impact [emphasis added].” Another noted that SVP provided him with a blueprint for his planned future giving, “SVP has given me an entirely new view of philanthropy as a process in which I can be very engaged, along with a vision of how I can continue to practice engaged philanthropy as an avocation when I transition out of my corporate career.” In one interview, the partner reflected that SVP had built “my own capacity as a philanthropist” just as SVP partners work to build nonprofits’ capacity. And his increased capacity then had benefits for his other philanthropic work: “I think I’m a much more wise or well informed committee member or board member on those organizations that I’m involved in that aren’t related to SVP.”

Interview data also confirmed the survey findings about specific changes in how partners give. When asked to elaborate on precisely how their giving had changed, many of the partners mentioned two ways in particular: 1) they give “fewer, bigger gifts,” and 2) they “give for capacity” and recognize the value of supporting general operating expenses instead of just programs. They used words like “more focused” or “concentrated” to describe their giving now, and emphasized the importance they now place on studying the organizations closely. As one partner explained about her family’s giving post-SVP, “Very rarely do we give designated gifts. It’s almost always general operating. And it’s almost always an organization that we have a relatively deep understanding of.”

The cross-tabulation analysis of survey responses revealed further details about this impact on how partners give. Among donors in their first year as SVP partners, there was not much difference in how many reported practicing certain characteristics before joining versus since. However, for the partners involved with SVP the longest (more than 5 years) the differences were quite substantial, and usually larger (proportionally) than for any other group with fewer years of involvement. This means that if we excluded the first-year partners, the increases for each of these characteristics of strategic philanthropy would be even higher than reported in Figures 2 and 3. What is more, the analysis also showed that these first-year partners were much less likely to report that SVP had been an important factor in changing how they gave, compared to those partners involved for more than one year. Meanwhile, the most experienced partners reported that SVP had had the greatest impact on how they give. So it appears that the impact of SVP is not immediate, and might not be felt by partners for at least a year, but that this effect is substantial after that and is long-lasting, even increasing in significance over time.⁵

Finally, cross-tabulations revealed that those people who reported involvement with significant outside philanthropic activities such as having their own family foundation, or having a donor-advised fund, reported similar increases in the same characteristics of strategic philanthropy as people who were not involved in those other major giving activities. The interview data summarized above would suggest that SVP led these people to be more strategic in their other major giving, although it is possible that for some people involved in major non-SVP giving, this other giving contributed to changing their giving strategy.

What Partners Learn

Clearly, then, partners feel that their involvement with SVP has an impact on their giving. And a great majority of them say they learned to practice a new, strategic, engaged way of giving, and learned a particular way of thinking about their giving. Further data was collected to delve more into this issue of learning, to get at the specific content of what partners have learned or developed—including new knowledge or expertise, new skills, and so on—as a result of their involvement with SVP.

⁵ There is some evidence from cross-tabulations that those individuals who were involved in the most SVP activities also reported that SVP had the most impact, but this is a less reliable finding because of smaller numbers of individuals in each category.

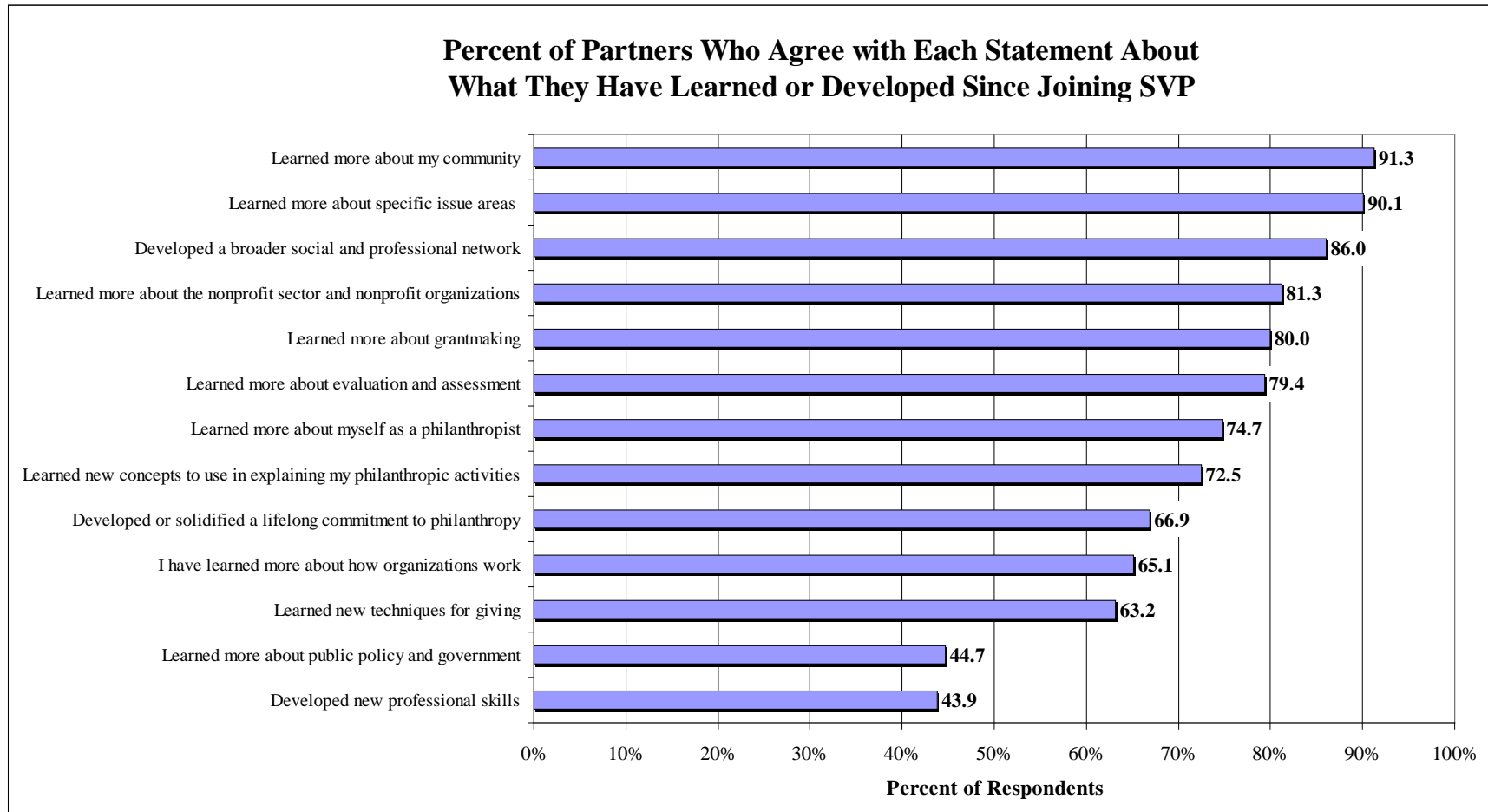
In the survey, a Likert-scale question solicited responses on the degree of agreement with several statements about what partners learned or developed. Figure 4 ranks the statements according to the percent of partners who indicated that they “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with it. (Full results for each statement are given in the Appendix, Table A-7.) Overall, a majority of partners indicated that they learned quite a range of different things since joining SVP. For all but two of the statements about learning, over 60% of the sample agreed, and for more than half of the statements over 75% agreed.

As with the issue of changes in how much partners give and how they give, survey respondents were asked about how much of a factor SVP has been in their learning, and this provides additional evidence for the finding that learning was widespread with 97.7% of the respondents indicated that they had learned something “significant” since joining SVP. This number is higher than either the percent who said they had changed how much they give (78.3%), or how they give (86.3%). When those 97.7% of respondents were then asked how much of a factor SVP had been, 58.6% said SVP was “a significant” or “the primary” factor in their learning, and only 1.7% said SVP was not a factor (Appendix Figure A-6).

All of this strong evidence that partners learn quite a bit as a result of their involvement with SVP makes it essential that we determine what specific content they learn. Looking at the statements in Figure 4, it is clear that more partners feel they have learned specific, factual information about issues, their local community, and nonprofit organizations and the nonprofit sector, while fewer partners feel they have learned new professional skills, organizational know-how, or information about public policy and government. This is perhaps an indication of the state of knowledge and skill development that many partners have before joining SVP—i.e., many of them know a lot about organizations in general or have highly developed professional skills, but they might not know as much about community issues such as charter schools or the environment, nor much about the distinctive operations of nonprofit organizations. This interpretation is further supported by the fact that a large number of partners reported significant learning about grantmaking and about evaluation and assessment—that is, specific nonprofit sector-related knowledge.

Interview data and open-ended survey responses were also helpful in getting at the specific content of what partners learned. In general, these data confirm the survey results, as interviewees primarily highlighted both “issue learning” (e.g., about community problems) and learning about nonprofit organizations. One partner said his involvement with SVP had “given me exposure to a set of populations in our community as well as a group of organizations that I just wouldn’t have had insight into.” Learning about nonprofits was what partners most commonly mentioned when asked what they had learned, particularly those partners (the vast majority) whose professional experience had been in the business world. They talked a lot about learning “how nonprofits are different” and gaining useful new knowledge of nonprofit budgeting, volunteer management, board effectiveness, the “community and consensus” style of nonprofit management, and so on. As one partner said, “I feel like I’ve developed a relatively deep understanding of how nonprofits function and sort of the unique challenges and opportunities that they offer and encounter.” They often pointed to the opportunity to examine a specific nonprofit in detail—something they do as part of the investment committee that decides who gets funds, and/or through site visits—as a source of this learning.

Figure 4:



Interviewees also talked quite a bit about the challenges of having to adapt their business knowledge and language in ways that helped them understand and work with nonprofits. This was one of the most common responses when interviewees were asked about “challenges or obstacles” they confronted in becoming a partner. One very experienced partner summed up the experience for business-minded partners this way: “There is a translation that we try to perform and it’s about different decision processes. It’s about different organizational models. It’s about cultural competency... And you know some people need a little bit, some people need a lot.” This reminds us that the process of learning to be an SVP-style philanthropist depends on where the donor is coming from, and that the process can be easier for some, harder for others.

In addition, many partners connected their learning about nonprofits to their new emphasis on giving for organizational capacity-building, part of the strategic philanthropy approach summarized earlier. Knowing more about how nonprofits work made partners want to focus their giving on making them work better. This is, of course, a key intention of the SVP partner development efforts, to show partners why SVP’s focus on capacity-building grants is warranted. In fact, the analysis of documents such as “Partner Development” outlines and the partner education curriculum of different affiliates showed that they emphasized the two areas that interviewees mentioned: issue knowledge (e.g., educational seminars on issue areas, talks by experts on certain approaches to problems), and knowledge about nonprofits (e.g., site visits, structured meetings with nonprofit Executive Directors). SVP staff interviews reinforced this approach; they said their goal in partner education was explicitly not to “instill values” but rather to expose partners to information about community needs and nonprofits, and to “provide the opportunity to exercise that learning in practical environments.” However, to be clear, partner education activities are not limited to these areas of learning. In fact, documents detailing the partner education plans of different affiliates all show a wide range of topics covered, including at times more personal development issues such as the challenge of raising children in families of means, or seminars about defining a personal mission.

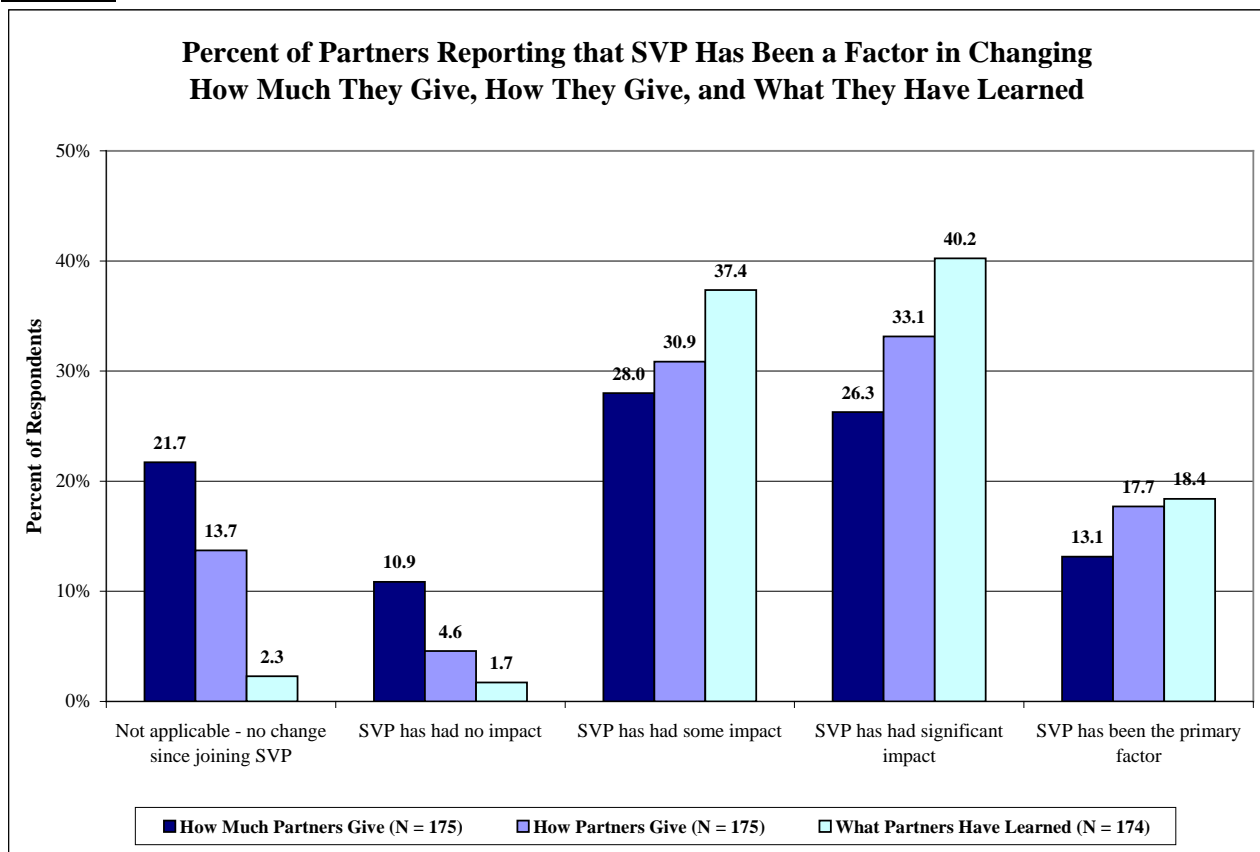
The opportunity to “exercise” learning was something also highlighted by many partners. For some, the numerous practical outlets for learning in SVP led to skill development. One partner described the “transformative piece” of SVP for him was the “opportunity... to develop either more fully a set of existing skills or develop a set of new skills.” He pointed specifically to the ability to ask better questions when analyzing and working with nonprofits. This is the skill extension, if you will, of the new knowledge about nonprofits that partners said they were learning. Another partner noted, “I’m beginning to know what questions to ask and read between the lines a little bit.” In fact, the data include a great many other similar comments about this specific ability to “ask better questions.” Another partner made the connection of knowledge to skill in a survey response: “SVP has given me much more insight into the way nonprofits can work and how I can help. I am much more informed and better able to engage in a highly productive conversation with nonprofits.” As noted earlier, partners feel they are better board members and donors outside of SVP now, as well. This is an explicit goal of SVP’s partner development plan, according to SVP leaders. They want to develop what one long-time staff person called “the right kind of civic and philanthropic leader,” not just good SVP partners.

Summary

Figure 5 below pulls together the survey findings about how much of an impact SVP has had on the three partner outcomes reviewed to this point: how much they give, how they give, and what they learned. Together, these findings confirm that SVP has had a major impact on partners' giving behavior, strategies, and knowledge. As noted, nearly all partners—97.7%—reported that they had learned or developed something significant since joining SVP, while 78.3% said their amount of giving changed, and 86.3% said they changed how they give. And of these high percentages of partners who reported a change, nearly all said SVP had some sort of impact on that change or that learning, often a significant impact. SVP was reported to have the strongest effect on partner learning, and relatively less effect on the amount of giving, which again can be explained in part by the effect of one's capacity to give a certain amount.

Comparing the survey responses across the 14 affiliate cities revealed little variation from these overall findings from place to place, which is further strong evidence for SVP's impact. The only significant variation across affiliates was in the number of people reporting that SVP was the primary factor affecting how much they give—this was much less likely in Seattle than other places. Again, this points to the possible importance of factors that increase (especially in a short time span) someone's capacity to give, which are common in a high tech economy like Seattle's and might change dramatically how much someone is able to give.

Figure 5:



SOCIALIZATION PROCESSES

Components of SVP Involvement

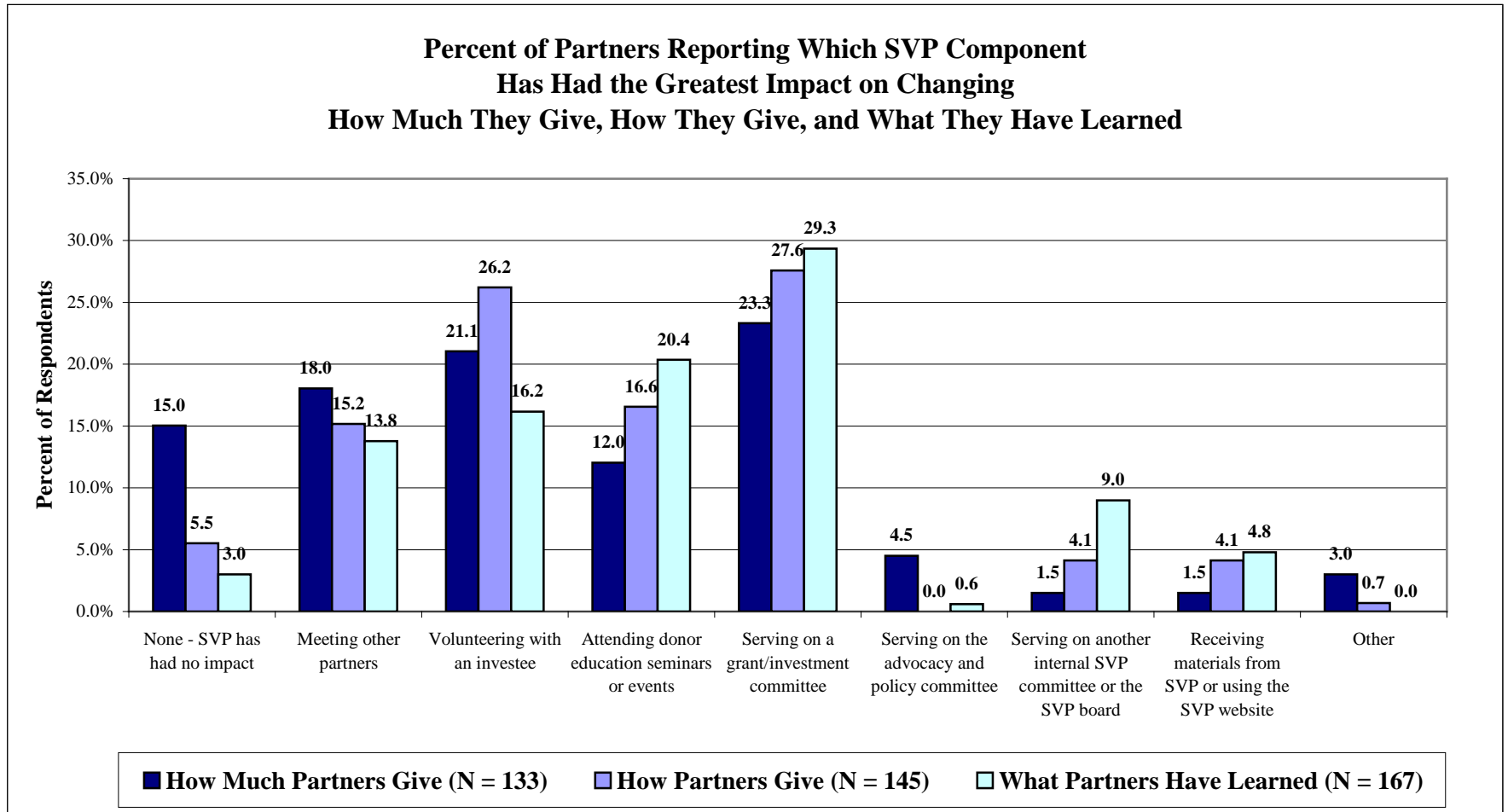
Recognizing that SVP has a notable impact on partners in the ways just reviewed, the next step is to look more closely at the different components of the SVP experience, to see which aspects of SVP socialization have more or less impact on giving, what partners learn from different socialization agents or venues, and so on. These components of partner involvement in SVP include the more formal education events as well as experiential learning opportunities such as meeting other partners, volunteering with investee organizations, or serving on operating committees of their affiliate. For each of the three partner outcomes already reviewed—how much partners give, how they give, and what they learned—the survey asked respondents to identify which of a list of components they felt had an impact, and then asked which component had the greatest impact. The results for the “greatest impact” question for each partner outcome are summarized in Figure 6. (Full results for both “any impact” and “greatest impact” questions for each outcome are given in the Appendix, in Tables A-8, A-9, and A-10).

The results of these multiple survey questions provide clear evidence that partners consider four primary components of SVP involvement as most important: meeting other partners, volunteering with an investee, attending donor education seminars or events, and serving on a grant/investment committee. The general conclusion we can draw, then, is that both formal and informal/experiential socialization processes were important in some way in changing giving behavior and strategies, and partner learning. The fact that partners answered these questions in fairly similar ways for the three different outcomes (with key differences, though, as described below) is particularly robust evidence of the importance of those four components. In fact, every one of those four were cited as an important influence on giving strategy and learning by a majority of respondents, and by nearly a majority for giving amount.

However, while seminars and directed donor education were certainly identified as important, the two components that were highlighted as having the greatest impact were serving on the grant/investment committee and volunteering, confirming previous research findings that experiential socialization has an especially powerful influence on behavior, attitudes, and learning. Interactive, practical, “hands on” work is considered by the partners to be the most influential avenue for donor learning and development; these components can be considered the peak socialization experiences in the SVP process. Serving on the grant or investment committee, which intensively reviews potential investee organizations and makes decisions about who will receive funding, is an intense activity and one that many SVP partners engage in during their first year or two as a partner. This is perhaps why it is cited as the greatest impact on all three partner outcomes—how much they give, how they give, and what they learned.

The only exception to the robust finding about the impact of those two experiential components is with regard to factors influencing the content of learning. Attending donor education events was ranked as the second greatest influence on what partners learned, ahead of volunteering (Table A-10). Cross-tabulations confirmed this finding, as those respondents who reported attending a donor education event were particularly likely also to say that attending that

Figure 6:



event was a major factor in what they learned. This is not surprising because the purpose of these events is to impart factual knowledge and information. Still, this finding serves as a reminder that formal education events have a particular role to play. Also, it is worth noting that “meeting other partners” was particularly important when partners considered what mattered for how much they give. One explanation for this might be the well-known power of peer recommendations of giving opportunities; partners heard from other partners about the other causes or organizations they support and looked into those to expand their own giving.

Cross-tabulation analysis showed that these patterns in which SVP components partners identified as influential were similar across the different affiliate cities. This suggests that there is a consistent set of socialization processes occurring in each affiliate, even despite the differences in partner backgrounds in various cities.

The similarity across affiliates, and the roles of different components, can be partly understood using the other data collected for this project, such as the documents, observations, and staff interviews in which they described how the SVP model for “philanthropy development” among partners was created and spread. As noted earlier, the various pieces of the SVP model—the seminar curriculum, interactive learning opportunities like committee work—evolved over many years, especially in the early years of original affiliate, SVP Seattle (see Guthrie, et al. 2003; Jacobs, 2006; SVP Seattle, 2005). At the beginning, SVP Seattle focused on basic educational programs about how to be an effective giver; they offered “truly 101 level courses” (SVP Seattle, 2007, p.14). Over time, the staff and partners realized they were learning as much or more from interactive, hands-on activities—including purely social partner gatherings. So they began to treat those as venues for partner development, and that side of the dual mission became more formalized. The overall framework for and commitment to partner development that emerged from SVP Seattle was then explicitly included as a key part of what was expected of each new SVP affiliate, even though each affiliate was also given some freedom to tweak the model to fit their local circumstances (e.g., their staff capacity, partner interests, etc.). Also, new innovations for socializing partners are always being developed, such as the attempts by some affiliates to create “special interest groups” or “affinity groups” of partners interested in similar causes or activities. But the core components of SVP involvement are the same in all affiliates. And affiliates constantly learn about partner development activities in other places through the SVPI Annual Conference and other communications. This, then, helps explain the similarities in partner socialization experiences in different places.

Partner interviews and open-ended survey responses provide more depth of understanding about the role of various components of SVP involvement, and help address the questions of what partners learn from each component and why experiential components are so key. Certainly, partners felt that the educational events such as seminars had a distinct role, especially orientation events for new partners and for any partner learning basic information about, as one put it, “what’s happening in the space, the sector.” Partners learned issue knowledge and information about community nonprofits from the formal events. However, the most useful and powerful learning was what partners variously called “immersion learning,” “first-person learning,” “learning through experience,” “real-time learning,” or learning “on the fly.” This sort of learning occurred in a variety of venues. Volunteering with investee nonprofits was obviously a primary hands-on learning process. But within SVP, also, “everything is ‘by

committee’.” Such interactive learning involved gaining knowledge and skills—e.g., information about how nonprofits “really work,” new language such as the SVP lingo, and the ability to evaluate nonprofit effectiveness. But it also involved using knowledge and skills, either new or existing. Using knowledge makes it stick. “You can’t understand it until you see it,” was how one person put it. Seeing the practical benefit of using knowledge is also a rush, as one interviewee explained, “I think one thing that happens is when [partners] see how significant their skill and their experience can be in another context, that’s a very, you know, ego-gratifying thing.” They enjoy it, and they keep at it, and they learn more and more.

The survey data pointed to the experience of working on an affiliate’s grant or investment committee as the most influential experience, and interview data strongly confirms this. In interviews, partners were asked to pretend they were in charge of reforming SVP’s partner education and development, and asked which one “indispensible element” they would certainly preserve. All but two of the 15 partners interviewed said the grant committee was the most indispensable—the other two said volunteering with investees, also not surprising. And SVP staff echoed this, saying that they see the grant committee as “the biggest lever that I think is helping us to create philanthropic leaders” and “if you made me drop the grant committees or the volunteering with investees, that would be cutting the heart out of the thing.” When asked why the grant committee was such an influential part of their process of becoming a partner, interviewees pointed to several aspects. Grant committees are intensive, “accelerated learning,” especially when it is the first major experience you have as a partner, and it requires a serious time commitment and “real dollars are on the line,” so people do not take it lightly. It also involves both vertical learning—e.g., from experienced partners and staff, from nonprofit leaders and experts on the issue area in which grants will be made—and horizontal learning—e.g., peer-to-peer learning among partners. One partner summed the grant committee up this way: “It’s just a very well supported environment to kind of test your early learning and test your legs with the new thinking.” Another said, “There is this kind of pleasant cycle going on of relationships are being developed, information’s being shared, and the opportunity [is presented] to exercise that new knowledge in terms of making grant decisions.”

Many partners also highlighted how peer-to-peer learning happens in many different parts of their SVP involvement, and how useful this was for learning as well as just networking and building friendships. Several interviewees commented on how much they appreciated being given the chance to interact with other people like themselves—that is, “focused,” “smart,” “driven,” “practical,” “outcome focused” people (including other partners and the nonprofit leaders). They learned from these people, especially from the experienced partners who lead committees and teams. As one partner put it, through observing how experienced partners interacted with nonprofits and made giving decisions, “you become somewhat imprinted with that, and you start looking at things a little differently.” But equally important, the chance to interact with these sorts of peers was “fun” and “intellectually and socially stimulating,” and this meant partners wanted to stay involved. Staying involved is, of course, the key to each individual’s continued socialization into the organization.

In sum, different data sources all point to the same conclusion. There is a distinct role for all of the key components of SVP involvement to play in partner socialization. As one partner summarized, “SVP provides this sort of triumvirate of education, experience, and a community

to share that with.” However, the experiential venues for socialization are considered the most indispensable by nearly everyone. One final caveat to these conclusions is important, though. The components that are most influential for a given partner might very well change over time, over the course of their involvement. One experienced partner insisted on this, saying, “you need to capture the continuum.” This continuum of partner learning is what we turn to next.

“Mileage Varies”

Despite the findings reviewed so far that show marked consistency in how SVP impacts partners’ socialization experiences, in what partners learn, and in the role played by different components of SVP, we have not yet determined whether the experience of becoming an SVP partner is similar for each individual, and whether the “learning curve” for partners follows a steady and predictable line. The data gathered for this project allow us to get at those questions to some extent, as well.

One finding that is clear from analysis of the survey responses is that partners who have been involved for less than one year (20% of the sample, according to Table A-1) report very different assessments of SVP’s impact on them. As noted earlier in the section on strategic philanthropy, first-year partners were less likely to identify SVP as the primary or a significant factor affecting how they give. Turns out this was true, to a slightly lesser extent, of first-year partners regarding how much they give and what they learned, as well. These first-year respondents were also the least likely to say they had already served on a grant/investment committee or already volunteered with an investee, which were identified definitively by more experienced partners as the peak socialization experiences. Moreover, the most experienced and most involved partners—the ones with the most years and who indicated the most number of different SVP activities—were also the most likely to report that SVP was the primary or a significant factor for them. It appears, then, that the first-year is an especially crucial time for partner socialization, and that over time SVP’s perceived effect on partners increases, especially for those who become very active in different SVP experiences.

From this we can conclude that SVP is a significant socializing agent, and that the “learning curve” for individual partners is initially steep but doesn’t necessary level off. The continuation of learning is somewhat surprising, especially given how important the first year is, but this finding is confirmed by the interview and other data. The interview pool included some of the longest-serving partners, and even though they are certainly biased by being very active over the course of many years, they all indicated that they continue to learn new knowledge and skills, albeit through different sorts of SVP activities than in the beginning (as suggested in the previous section). One experienced partner described it this way, “There’s an evolution from learner/participant mode, to leader mode, to evangelist mode.” Partner development occurs at each stage. A common metaphor for this continual learning was one repeated in several sessions at the SVPI Annual Conference: “There is no finish line.”

Several affiliates have been trying to specify the stages of this “life cycle” of partner philanthropic development in a way that will help them both understand and encourage the continual learning. San Diego SVP is developing a system of classifying levels of partners,

trying to categorize different amounts of engagement as well as model common paths over time. The most advanced work to formalize the life cycle has been done, not surprisingly, by the oldest and largest affiliate, SVP Seattle. The Seattle staff created a “partner development framework” that included seven “areas of competency”—e.g., “Grantmaking,” “Nonprofit Sector,” “Issues,” “Values, Motivation, & Integration,” “Cultural Competency,” etc.—that partners can (and hopefully will) develop through various SVP involvements. And they have delineated a “partner life cycle” that fits what they have learned by watching so many individuals move from the “101 level courses” described earlier to the “graduate level” training (often experiential) that partners want as they progress. The stages in the life cycle of developing these areas of competency move from “Learn and Grow” to “Deepen and Strengthen,” and finally to “Lead and Amplify.”

However, staff of SVPI, SVP Seattle, and other affiliates are always careful to note that the process of becoming an SVP partner is not fixed and resistant to individual interests or needs. They insist, “the overall donor education process is not a straight and narrow road with predictable entry points and timed exits for completed learning (SVP Seattle 2007, p. 15).” Ultimately, the partner life cycle is an “individualized path” to some extent, even though there are common (perhaps necessary) stages along the path. For one thing, people come into the organization with different backgrounds, knowledge, and skill—e.g., some have extensive experience with nonprofits while others know little. How partners move through the SVP socialization process “depends on what they bring to the table,” as one interviewee put it. Another said becoming part of SVP was similar to becoming a part of any culture; how easy or difficult it is for someone to adapt to that culture depends “on the culture you are coming from.”

Another reason the socialization process varies a bit for different individual partners is because the process depends on the extent of involvement each partner chooses. As one partner put it in a survey response, “mileage varies based on what you sign up for.” This is a very instructive finding because it helps understand how the process can have standardized stages and components and effects, but still be individualized based on how quickly or intensively a certain partner engages. Several interviewees made a similar point, as one explained, “This is an organization that you get out of it what you put into it. That’s not a cliché.” Another posited a “direct correlation” between time and learning: “my learning advancements have been directly related to the amount of time I’ve spent on projects related to the organization.” Thinking about this alongside the earlier survey findings about the importance of time and level of involvement, we can conclude that there is an interesting sort of reinforcement mechanism built into the process of becoming a partner. The more a partner becomes involved, the more they learn and the more they become inculcated into SVP. And this learning and increased socialization then leads to greater involvement, which leads to more learning, and so on.

However, this cycle of reinforcement can work in the negative as well. If for some reason a partner does not become that engaged soon after recruitment, or has to back out of SVP involvements for other reasons, they report less SVP impact and less connection to the organization. A couple interviews told cautionary tales about partners who fell out of the organizational orbit in this way. This was in fact one of the few items that arose when interviewees were asked to describe “challenges and obstacles” in the process of becoming a partner. The most common challenge mentioned was the “translation” between business thinking and the nonprofit world, reviewed earlier. But partners also talked about the challenge

of providing adequate opportunities for involvement for all partners, especially new partners, to avoid individuals feeling that their learning had stagnated. One partner stated this challenge in an interesting way when making a suggestion on the survey. Following the intensive orientation, “I think you lose people in the transition” to continued involvement, so SVP needs “a better ramp to wade into the shallow end of the pool.” In general, because SVP has as part of its dual mission the goal of developing philanthropic leaders, it must work hard to provide opportunities for potential leaders to be closely involved in ways that facilitate their development at all stages. This was particularly difficult in larger affiliates with more partners.

SVP Versus Other Sources of Socialization

While the evidence reviewed so far has suggested that socialization into SVP has a considerable effect on partners, it is still important to assess how that effect compares to other potential non-SVP influences on partners. The survey included a question asking partners about a number of significant life experiences that could potentially influence how, how much, and in what way a person will go about their giving later in life. For each experience or other aspect of life, the partner indicated whether it had more, similar, or less “influence on their giving” in general, when compared to the influence of SVP. This is an important addition to the survey information because without it we might easily overestimate the relative role of SVP on the behavior and thinking of these partners.

Table 2: Percent of Partners Indicating that Other Aspects of Life Have More, Less, or a Similar Amount of Influence on their Philanthropic Giving, Compared to SVP’s Influence

	<i>More than SVP</i>	<i>Similar to SVP</i>	<i>Less than SVP</i>	N
Major life transition	30.5	31.2	38.3	141
Spiritual values or involvement in religious activities	28.2	35.2	36.6	142
Professional training and work experiences	28.1	38.4	33.6	146
Other (non-SVP) experiences as a donor, volunteer, or board member	25.0	41.7	33.3	156
Discussions with family or friends	24.0	42.7	33.3	150
Involvement with politics	23.1	30.8	46.2	143
Financial planning and advice received	21.0	34.8	44.2	138
Personal observations or analysis of the significant need for philanthropy	17.6	56.8	25.7	148
Traumatic experiences (you or someone close to you)	17.0	20.7	62.2	135
Involvement in other community activities	15.3	42.0	42.7	150
Interactions with, or observations of government	12.6	32.6	54.8	135
Interactions with various mass media	11.0	23.5	65.4	136
Philanthropic help received in the past	7.2	24.0	68.8	125

As shown in Table 2, none of the other elements of their lives were considered by a majority of partners to have more of an influence on their giving than SVP, and for most of the

elements fewer than one quarter of partners felt it had more influence. However, there were several parts of their lives (nearly all of the items on the list) which a majority of partners thought had at least a similar influence to SVP. This suggests that partners do recognize the sometimes predominant role of other socialization agents or significant events, even though the importance of SVP remains notable.

The other aspect of their life that was considered by the highest percent of partners to have more influence than SVP was going through a “major life transition.” This could, of course, include a professional transition such as selling a business or retiring, which can often be the event that considerably increases an individual’s capacity to give. In addition, several other items on the list were cited by over 60% of respondents as having either a similar or greater influence relative to SVP. These included spiritual values or religious activities, professional training, and other philanthropic involvements. Deeper analysis showed that other philanthropic involvements were particularly important to the biggest givers—those giving \$50,000 a year or more—which makes sense given that they are probably most likely to be most intensely involved in other substantial giving ventures outside SVP, such as setting up their own family foundations or hiring philanthropic advisors. Traumatic experiences appeared to matter a great deal to some partners, but over 60% of partners listed such traumatic experiences as less influential, most likely because they had not had such experiences.

Additional analysis revealed that the least involved partners—those who reported no other SVP activities beyond giving their annual contribution—were the least likely to say SVP had some sort of impact on their giving, and the most likely to report that these other aspects of their lives had a similar or greater influence on their giving. The same was true, again, for the first-year partners. Taken together, this evidence confirms the overall finding that the more involved a partner becomes in SVP, the more of an impact they report SVP having on how much they give, how they give, and what they learn.

Interview data allowed some further insight into the relative influence of SVP versus other aspects of partners’ lives. That data generally confirmed the main finding from the survey that SVP mattered as much or more than other possible influences on giving, except in those cases where the partner experienced a significant life event that either made them dedicate themselves more fully to philanthropy or provided them the time and resources to do so. Partners related many stories in interviews about how they became involved in SVP because they wanted to be more directive and effective in their giving, and so the SVP experience was particularly influential for them once they got involved. Some talked about how retirement from their jobs, selling a successful business, or another sort of “liquidity event,” allowed them to be more active and to give more, which confirms some earlier indications from survey data that someone’s capacity to give is an important factor. Interviewees also, as noted earlier, emphasized the importance of “where a partner is coming from” when they join SVP, and this includes at times what else is happening in their lives, especially what other philanthropic experiences they’ve had. Finally, some partners in their interviews talked a lot about how their approach to giving, while influenced strongly by SVP, was also something they tried to “integrate into our family life” and “pass on to our children,” and so family conversations about giving (often bringing back home what they learned in SVP) were influential in those cases.

CONCLUSIONS

To help meet the urgent need for better understanding of donor education and development, this report detailed the findings from a multi-method research project on donor socialization in the pioneering organization Social Venture Partners International. The project set out to investigate both what SVP partners learn and how they learn it, to address questions about the content, process, and impact of socialization on these donors, and to eventually derive some recommendations for how to improve donor development.

The results provide evidence that involvement with SVP has an effect—and an effect of the intended sort—on the individuals who chose to become partners and to learn and practice this distinctive approach to giving. Partners indicated in both survey responses and interviews that their involvement with SVP was a factor – often a major factor – determining changes in how much they give, how they give, and what they have learned or developed since becoming SVP partners. Moreover, the influence of SVP appears to become more pronounced both as partners become involved in more SVP activities and as they are partners for a longer time (especially following the first year as a partner). This again supports the conclusion that SVP has a strong socialization effect, something it tries very hard to achieve. In short, SVP socialization has an impact on partners’ behavior, practices, and knowledge. These results, then, confirm earlier findings about SVP’s impact on partners (e.g., Kahn, 2007), but do so with more geographically diverse data and with some more depth of explanation provided in interviews. The findings here also complement other recent research which documented the significant impact that giving circles of all types have on their members (Eikenberry and Bearman, 2009).

The impact of SVP socialization is perhaps most clearly seen in relation to how partners give, in how they practice the specific elements of the “strategic philanthropy” approach that SVP promotes. Giving practices such as a focus on results, an emphasis on giving for capacity-building among recipient organizations, and writing fewer but larger checks, are all clearly emphasized in the SVP model of grantmaking, and these are also the practices that were highlighted by partners as those which changed the most in response to their SVP involvement—although they are certainly not the only strategic philanthropy practices they learned.

The findings here also confirmed the small amount of previous research (Guthrie, et al., 2003) on the content of what partners learned through their involvement with SVP. Partners reported learning a range of things, but especially knowledge about social issues, their local community, and nonprofit organizations and the nonprofit sector in general. One of the challenges partners encountered in their process of becoming a part of SVP, in fact, was the difficult “translation” work they had to do as business-minded professionals learning how things work in the nonprofit world.

This project provided good insight into the different specific socialization processes that SVP partners go through. Various data showed consistently that both formal donor education processes (e.g., partner training events) and informal or experiential donor engagement processes (e.g., meeting other partners, volunteering or working on a committee) played an influential role, but the interactive learning venues were considered the most impactful. Partner education events were especially helpful in providing factual knowledge, while the range of experiential processes

allowed partners to “exercise” their knowledge and skills in ways that made the learning stick and kept them engaged. In particular, two of the more hands-on SVP activities,—serving on a grant or investment committee, and volunteering with an investee—were identified repeatedly as having the greatest impact. It appears these two SVP activities should be considered the peak socialization experiences for partners. These findings about the importance of informal means of socialization confirm earlier research on socialization, including previous studies of partner development in SVP Seattle (Guthrie, et al., 2003; Jacobs, 2006; SVP Seattle 2005).

There appeared to be a common learning curve for each partner going through the SVP socialization process—crucial engagement in the first-year, then continued learning coming from varied experiences with no finish line, and even identifiable stages of “philanthropy development” of partners. However, the findings here also suggest the importance of an individualized path that takes into account where a donor is coming from and, especially, their extent of involvement. There was a cycle of reinforcement so that partners who were more engaged learned more and stayed engaged, which facilitated effective socialization.

Finally, the range of influences of SVP socialization was considered important even when explicitly compared to other life experiences and influences. While certain other aspects of life were acknowledged to have a notable impact on the partners-as-donors, including many that were seen as having a similar impact to SVP, none were considered more important by a majority of respondents. However, there was consistent evidence across a range of measures to indicate that an individual’s capacity to give, in itself, is a powerful influence on their giving—especially on how much they give.

Implications for Donor Education and Development

Studying a successful and often imitated model of donor education and learning such as Social Venture Partners holds great promise for advancing understanding of the neglected but crucial topic of donor socialization, and for improving the still evolving practice of donor development and advisement. Effective donor socialization is essential to the long-term sustainability and increased capacity of philanthropic organizations of all types. The insights from the research reported here can hopefully help a range of organizations structure their donor education and learning activities to ensuring long-term donor commitment and strategic donor orientation.

Below are a few suggestions for donor education and development that arise from the findings about SVP partner development reported above. These are meant to be useful for a variety of organizational types and donor education practitioners. This would include, obviously, SVP affiliates themselves and groups most similar to SVP such as other “high engagement” or “venture philanthropy” grantmaking organizations or giving circles. But these suggestions might also be of interest to other practitioners who are on the front-lines of donor education and advisement, such as philanthropic advising services, community foundations, financial advisors, and fund raising professionals for individual nonprofits.

- Create more experiential, interactive venues for learning. While educational and orientation events and information are necessary, the most powerful and lasting donor “education” comes through hands-on, real-time opportunities to exercise that learning. Encourage donors to become volunteers, or to volunteer in more intensive ways than they do currently, especially if they can use their existing professional skills and knowledge. Don’t shy away from asking for time commitments from donors who indicate a keen interest.
- Provide ample opportunities for both intense and sustained involvement, but allow for individualization. Balance formalization of the donor development process with opportunities for donors to take the path that best suits them. Pay special attention, following intense initial engagements, to the ramp from the deep end to the shallow end of involvement. The more opportunities for involvement the more effective and lasting the donor development will be.
- Help donors that have little experience in the nonprofit sector with the translation process. Help them adapt—in productive, sensitive ways—their business (or other) language, knowledge, and skills to this new nonprofit environment. Provide them with opportunities to engage in depth with the details of nonprofit management and challenges, especially if you want them to be willing to give for operations and capacity-building rather than just new programs.
- Encourage and provide opportunities for peer-to-peer learning among donors. Structured ways for new donors to learn from experienced donors are especially important. Create a donor mentorship program that goes beyond simply providing information or technical advice and encourages personalized philanthropic coaching.
- Learn about and complement where donors are coming from. Talk to donors about their situation in specific ways—e.g., whether they are going through a major professional transition, how they are talking about giving within their families—and adapt donor education and involvement so it integrates with these other parts of their lives.

Suggestions for Future Research

While this study contributes to our understanding of donor socialization, the research was limited in certain ways, and future research can help transcend these limits and expand our understanding. For one thing, the analysis of donor learning in one organization—even an organization often cited as a leader in these matters—is not sufficient to make broad conclusions about all donors and all donor education processes. Studies of other donors and other approaches to giving are certainly necessary. Also, while the multiple sources of data allowed for some insight into explanations for the main findings about SVP impacts—e.g., interviews helped understand how and why certain elements of the experience mattered most—there is a larger level of explanation that only a larger and more diverse database can address. It is possible, for instance, that the specific dynamics about how donor socialization works in SVP are somehow

unique to the relatively affluent and well-educated population involved as SVP partners. Again, future research looking at a broader array of donors and organizations, asking similar questions as those addressed here, is key.

We should also keep in mind that the overall N of this survey is fairly small (N=175), and the geographic scope is relatively limited (there were 14 cities but for a few of those cities only a few individuals participated). In particular, the survey respondents came predominantly from the oldest and most well-established affiliates. Those affiliates generally have the most explicitly codified donor development processes, which might make a difference even for the newest partners in those cities. Future research on SVP should attempt to generate a larger sample of partners from a broader set of affiliates. It should also be sure to systematically compare the results across cities and across other dimensions of the partner sample—e.g., how many years they have been involved—as that cross-tabulation analysis was particularly helpful in this study.

Finally, it is important to remember that all of this data is self-reported by people who can generally be assumed to be supportive of the goals of SVP. Ideally, future research will be able not only to observe giving behavior and learning directly, but also to ask similar questions of former partners who have since exited from the socialization process they are being asked to assess.

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APPENDIX

Table A-1: Length of SVP Membership (N = 175)

Number of Years	% of Respondents
0-1 year	20.0
1-2 years	13.7
2-3 years	10.9
3-4 years	10.3
4-5 years	9.7
Over 5 years	35.4

Table A-2: SVP Affiliate to Which Partners Belong (N = 175)

Affiliate	% of Respondents
Seattle	30.3
Dallas	16.0
Arizona	8.6
San Diego	7.4
Cleveland	7.4
Boulder County	6.3
Denver	6.3
Los Angeles	5.7
Cincinnati	3.4
Portland	2.9
Tucson	2.3
Calgary	1.1
Pittsburgh	1.1
Rhode Island	1.1

Table A-3: SVP Activities in Which Partners Have Been Involved (N = 175)

	% of Respondents
Attending at least one donor education event per year	74.9
Serving on a grant/investment committee	61.1
Volunteering with an SVP investee	59.4
Serving on another internal working committee	49.7
Serving on SVP's board	40.6
Serving on the advocacy and policy committee	8.0
No involvement in SVP beyond initial/annual monetary donation	8.0

Table A-4: Other Forms of Philanthropy in Which SVP Partners are Involved (N = 175)

	% of Respondents
Giving money to a nonprofit organization or charitable cause (other than SVP)	95.4
Volunteering for a nonprofit organization or charitable cause (other than SVP)	76.0
Serving on the board of a nonprofit organization (other than SVP)	61.1
Holding a donor advised account at a local community foundation	24.0
Managing or sitting on the board of your own or your family's foundation	16.6
Maintaining a charitable gift fund with a commercial firm	10.3
Participating in a giving circle (outside of SVP)	8.0
Other	8.0
None, SVP is the only form of philanthropy that I participate in right now.	0.6

Table A-5: Select Demographic Characteristics of Partners

	% of Respondents
GENDER	N = 166
Male	53.6
Female	46.4
AGE	N = 167
25 - 34	5.4
35 - 44	21.6
45 - 54	41.9
55 - 64	22.8
65 -74	7.8
75 +	0.6
EDUCATION	N = 166
Some college-level coursework	4.8
Bachelor's degree	24.1
Some graduate-level coursework	11.4
Master's degree	46.4
Doctoral degree	13.3
MARITAL/PARTNERSHIP STATUS	N = 168
Married or in a long-term partnership	83.9
Separated	0.6
Single, divorced	8.3
Single, never married	6.5
Widowed	0.6
CHILDREN UNDER 18 IN HOME	N = 165
0	60.0
1	9.7
2	23.0
3	7.3

Table A-6: Occupational Areas Partners Report as Their Primary Field of Work (N = 166)

Occupational Area	% of Respondents
Finance/Accounting/Banking	18.1
Management Consulting	9.6
Volunteer	9.6
Computer/IT	9.0
Nonprofit - Grantmaking	4.8
Advertising/PR/Marketing	4.2
Health Care/Medical	4.2
Legal	4.2
Arts/Entertainment/Publishing	3.6
Real Estate	3.6
Retired	3.6
Numerous other areas	< 3.0

Figure A-1:

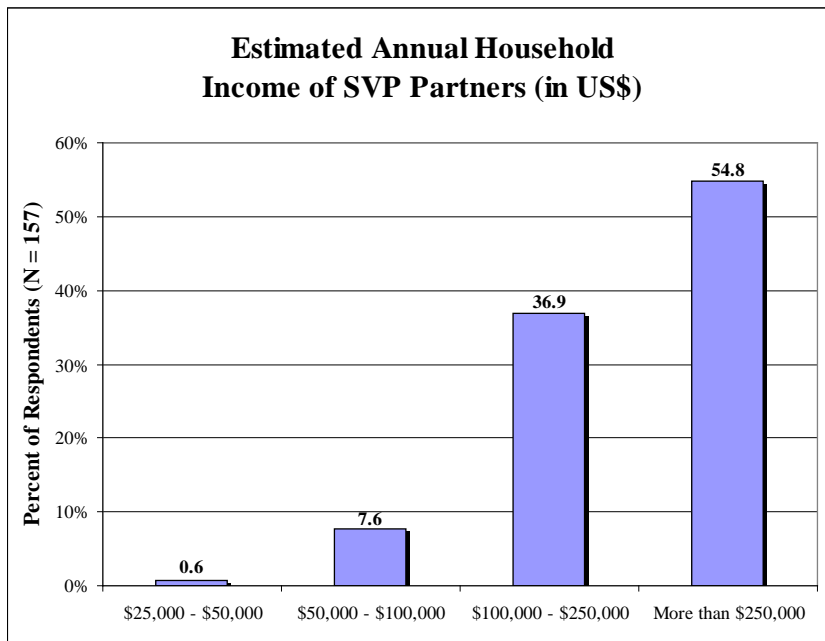


Figure A-2:

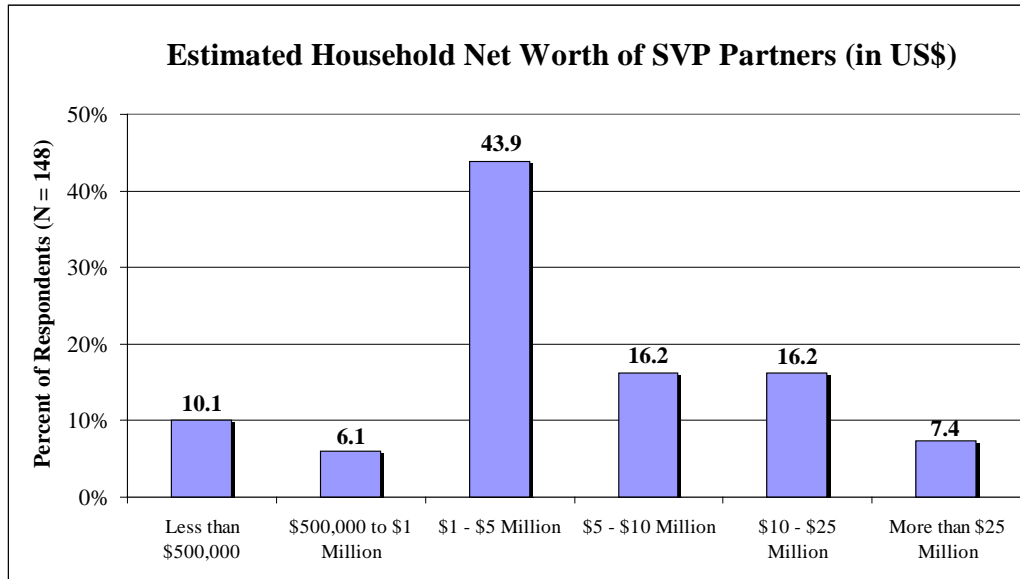


Figure A-3:

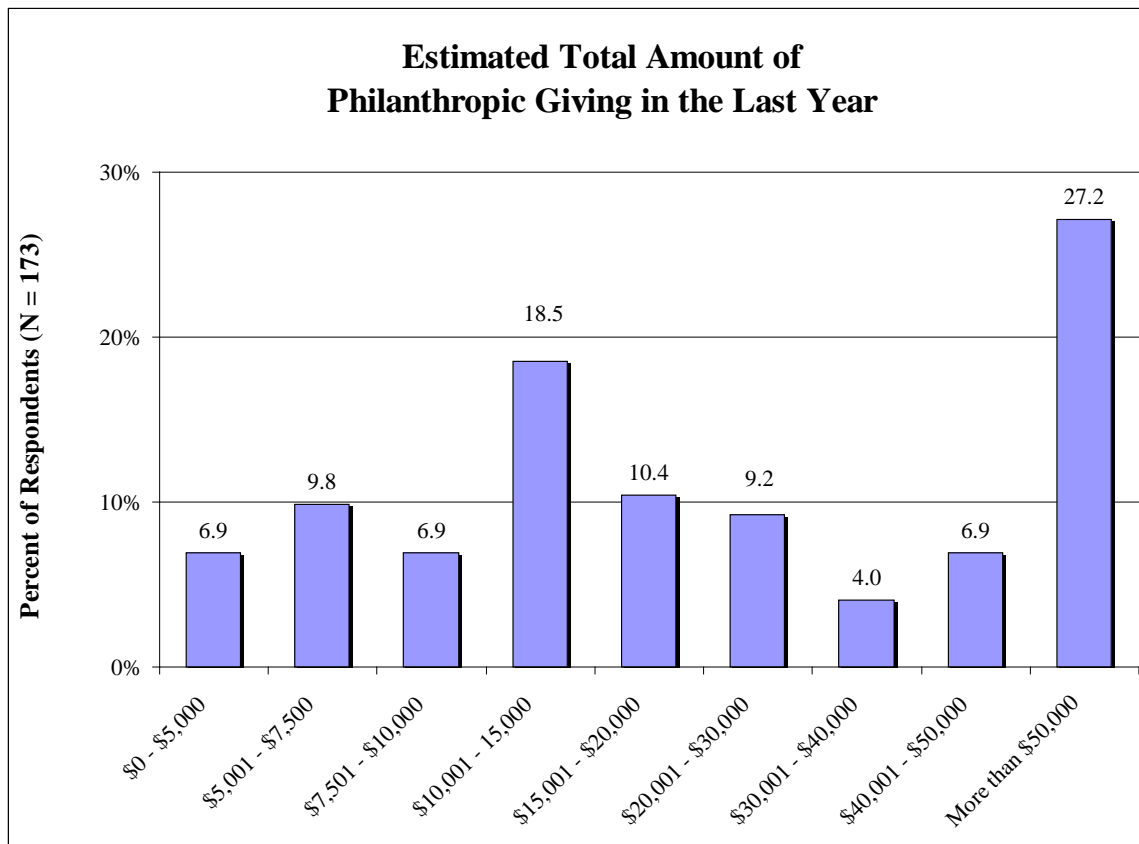


Figure A-4:

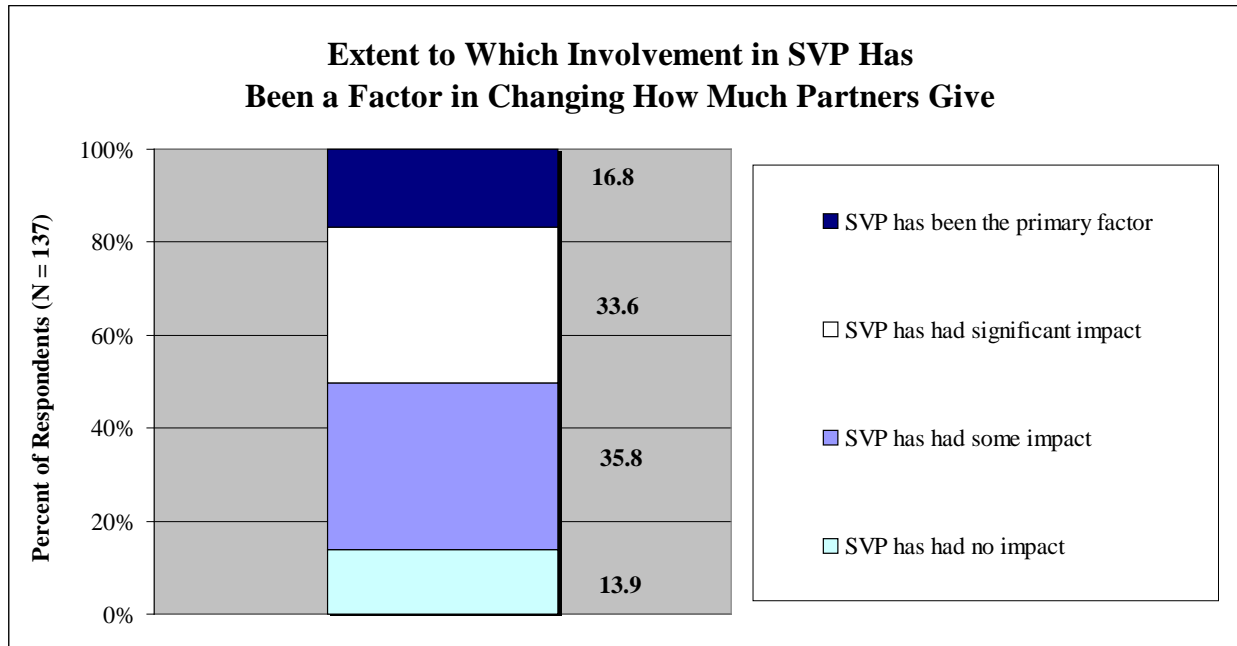


Figure A-5:

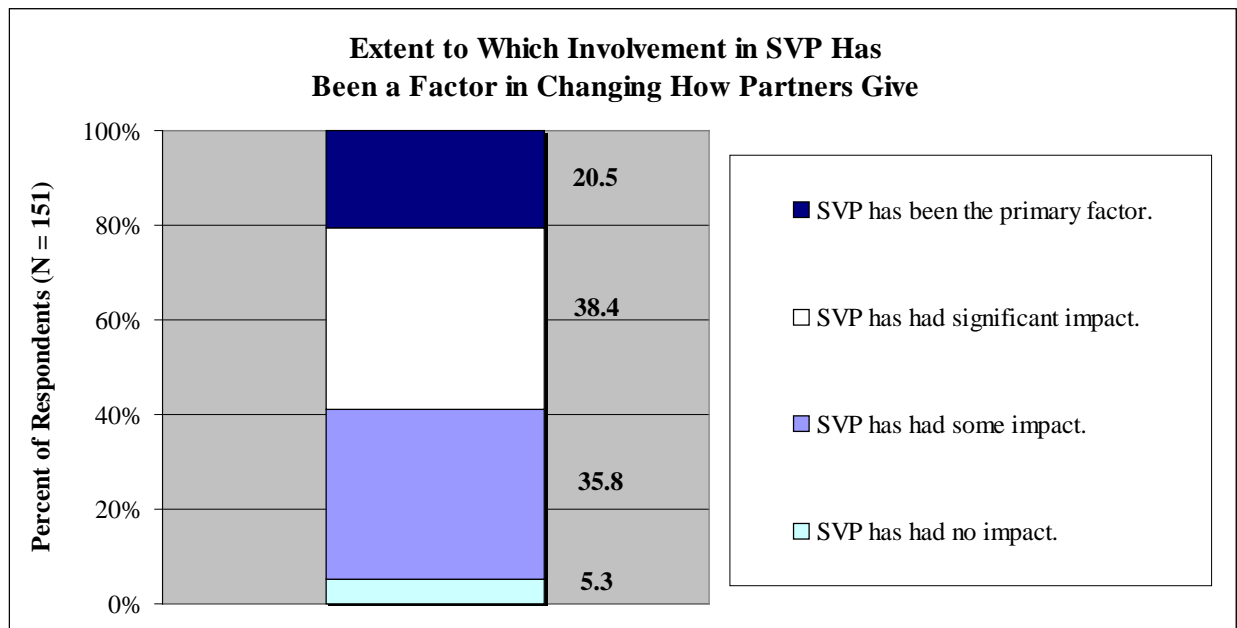
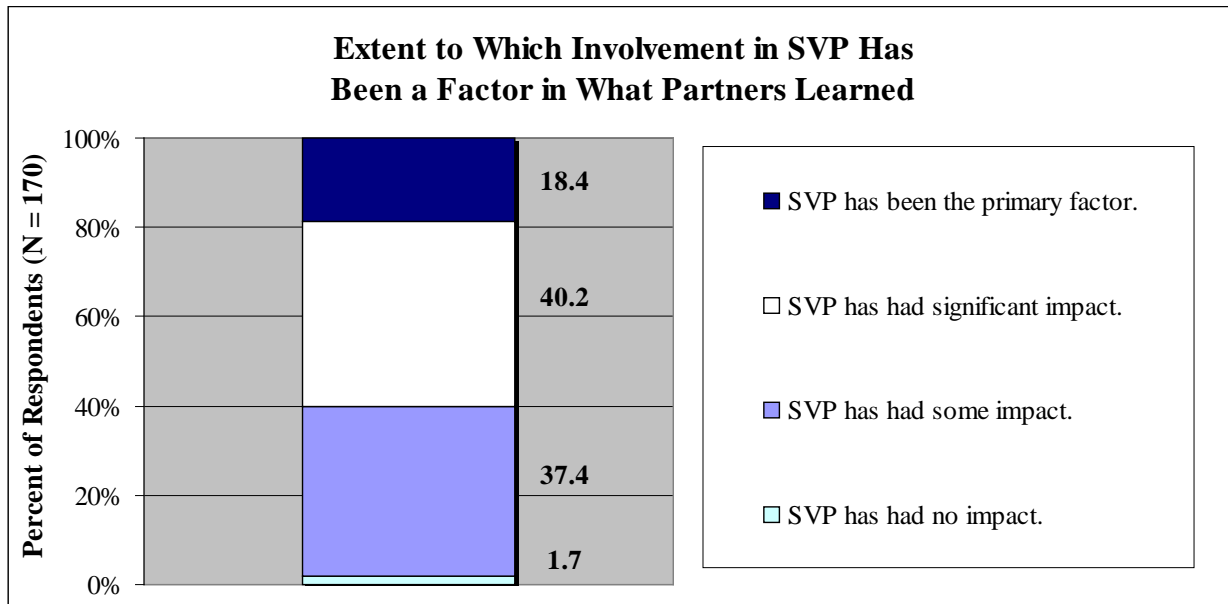


Table A-7: Percent of Partners Agreeing with Statements About What They Have Learned or Developed Since Joining SVP

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	N
Learned more about my community	0.0	0.6	8.1	55.2	36.0	172
Learned more about specific issue areas	0.0	0.6	9.3	44.8	45.3	172
Learned more about the nonprofit sector and nonprofit organizations	0.0	2.4	16.4	39.2	42.1	171
Learned more about public policy and government	1.8	17.1	36.5	32.4	12.4	170
Learned more about grantmaking	0.0	4.1	15.9	45.9	34.1	170
Learned more about evaluation and assessment	0.0	4.1	16.5	48.2	31.2	170
Learned more about how organizations work	0.6	7.6	26.7	44.2	20.9	172
Learned new concepts to use in explaining my philanthropic activities	0.0	3.5	24.0	44.4	28.1	171
Learned new techniques for giving	0.6	8.2	28.1	39.2	24.0	171
Developed new professional skills	1.2	16.4	38.6	33.3	10.5	171
Developed a broader social and professional network	0.6	0.6	12.8	55.2	30.8	172
Learned more about myself as a philanthropist	0.0	3.5	21.8	49.4	25.3	170
Developed or solidified a lifelong commitment to philanthropy	1.8	4.8	26.5	41.6	25.3	166

Figure A-6:



**Table A-8: Components of SVP Which Have Had an Impact on Changing
How Much Partners Give**

	Components which have had <i>any impact*</i>	Component which has had the <i>greatest impact</i>
Meeting other partners	48.2%	18.0%
Volunteering with an investee	46.0%	21.1%
Attending donor education seminars or events	51.8%	12.0%
Serving on a grant/investment committee	46.0%	23.3%
Serving on the advocacy and policy committee	8.8%	4.5%
Serving on another internal SVP committee or the SVP board	24.1%	1.5%
Receiving materials from SVP or using the SVP website	14.6%	1.5%
None - SVP has had no impact	16.8%	15.0%
Other	8.8%	3.0%
N =	137	133

*Respondents were asked to check all components that applied

Table A-9: Components of SVP Which Have Had an Impact on Changing How Partners Give

	Components which have had any impact*	Component which has had the greatest impact
Meeting other partners	53.7%	15.2%
Volunteering with an investee	50.3%	26.2%
Attending donor education seminars or events	61.1%	16.6%
Serving on a grant/investment committee	55.7%	27.6%
Serving on the advocacy and policy committee	8.7%	0.0%
Serving on another internal SVP committee or the SVP board	25.5%	4.1%
Receiving materials from SVP or using the SVP website	23.5%	4.1%
None - SVP has had no impact	6.0%	5.5%
Other	6.0%	0.7%
N =	149	145

*Respondents were asked to check all components that applied

Table A-10: Components of SVP Which Have Had an Impact on What Partners Have Learned or Developed

	Components which have had any impact*	Component which has had the greatest impact
Meeting other partners	66.9%	13.8%
Volunteering with an investee	53.0%	16.2%
Attending donor education seminars or events	69.9%	20.4%
Serving on a grant/investment committee	58.4%	29.3%
Serving on the advocacy and policy committee	8.4%	0.6%
Serving on another internal SVP committee or the SVP board	32.5%	9.0%
Receiving materials from SVP or using the SVP website	25.3%	4.8%
None - SVP has had no impact	2.4%	3.0%
Other	3.6%	0.0%
N =	166	167

*Respondents were asked to check all components that applied