understanding our philanthropic commons

Aspen Grove  Brigham Young University | Sundance UT
Sept 28-Oct 1, 2022

Call for Proposals
INTRODUCTION

Elinor (1933-2012) and Vincent Ostrom (1919-2012) left a lasting impact across a host of academic disciplines and fields including political science, economics, public policy, environmental science, anthropology, psychology, and informatics. Over the course of six decades, the Ostroms cultivated diverse streams of theoretical and empirical work seeking to comprehend how humans develop systems of rules and norms to solve complex problems and how they behave within those systems. One of their largest, lasting contributions has been to illuminate ways to manage common pool resources. These are resources that are subtractable and difficult to exclude, which can lead to depletion if institutional arrangements do not successfully govern the commons (Ostrom 1990). Much of the Ostroms’ work focuses on self-organization, voluntary action, collaboration, and non-governmental institutions and yet there has been scant attention from scholars of nonprofit and voluntary action studies (see Bushouse, Never and Christensen, 2016). This Call for Proposals seeks to bridge that gap.

Specifically, this conference focuses on the philanthropy commons. If we engage through the commons lens, it focuses our attention on the institutional arrangements that lead to maintaining or depleting the commons. Brudney and Meijs (2009) made a similar argument for the volunteer commons (2009) and developed the design principles and the concept of volunteer energy (and Overbeeke 2019). We seek to engage in generative and rigorous discussions to critically assess current philanthropic institutional arrangements to generate insights and potential institutional solutions. The tragedies that can accompany commons may already be evident in donative philanthropy. For example, in the US, workplace donations are down (Shaker and Christensen 2017) and while United Way giving is still at arguably high levels, even these have steadily declined since 2007 (Charity Watch 2019). The Nonprofit Quarterly reports that one of the most concerning pieces of this general trend is “the steady decline in the proportion of Americans who report making donations to charitable organizations” (Ashley, 2019). This same trend is evident in the United Kingdom and Canada, where the proportion of givers is on the decline and the mode of giving has evolved to episodic and online.

GUIDELINES

Conference proposals should comprise a variety of scholarly perspectives with a range of empirical, theoretical and methodological approaches to critically assess the argument that donative philanthropy is a common pool resource, exhibiting both the difficulty of exclusion from asks and depletion of the giving resource (“donative energy”) resulting from the cumulative effects of repeated asks for money. The philanthropy-as-commons conceptualization focuses attention on a variety of institutional arrangements that are used to “extract” philanthropic donations and also ones that protect the commons. We invite submissions focused on different institutional arrangements, e.g., Giving Circles, GoFundMe, Donor Advised Funds, Community Foundations, etc. We also invite papers
focused on particular countries, religions, and cultural giving traditions. All proposals should address how the proposal topic sustains (grow donors) depletes the giving commons, e.g., donor fatigue. All potential topical areas related to this call are open for consideration including those critical of the commons conceptual lens.

We seek to publish papers in an edited volume that contributes to advancing our understanding of philanthropy as a common pool resource and how to advance knowledge of the philanthropic commons through the study of different institutional arrangements, roles of voluntary action, and broader relations to civil society. The papers can be theoretical, empirical or exploratory and may relate to, but are not limited to, the following frameworks, theories, models, and tools.

- Using the Institutional Analysis and Development Framework (IAD) to understand how the rules, attributes of community, and attributes of the philanthropic common pool resource impacts donor decisions with subsequent outcomes affecting the commons
- Utilizing the Ostrom’s design principles for the study of commons to new empirical settings to better understand how individuals and institutions relate to the philanthropic commons, voluntary actions and civil society
- Explorations of how Elinor Ostrom’s work in experimental economics and game theory can inform our understanding of philanthropic commons
- Applications of the Institutional Grammar to philanthropic institutions

Additional guidance can be found in the attached chapter and https://journals.sagepub.com/toc/nvs/45/4_suppl

TIMELINE

- A conference abstract (of no more than 500 words) that ties submitter’s work to commons, due by April 15, 2022 to rc@byu.edu
- The conference committee will share their decisions by May 2, 2022.
- Accepted proposals should be developed into a 10-15 page paper by Sept 1, 2022
  - Authors will not present their own work, but will present (in Ostrom tradition) each others’ work.
- Conference will be held Sept 28-Oct 1, 2022 at Brigham Young University’s Aspen Grove Family Lodge and Conference Center in Sundance, UT. Room and board is provided for one presenter for each accepted paper.
- Finished papers will be due by December 31, 2022 for submission to an academic press as part of an edited volume. Editors: Brenda Bushouse, Brent Never, Robert K. Christensen.
REFERENCES


