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EYE ON HEALTH

MacKenzie Scott directed a large share of her 2023 giving to health-care organizations, especially community providers like the J.C. Lewis Primary Health Care Center in Savannah, Ga.

What MacKenzie Scott Wants in a Grantee

A study of the billions in gifts by the maverick philanthropist reveals a little about which organizations she favors.

By DREW LINDSAY

WHAT KINDS OF NONPROFITS does MacKenzie Scott support?

Almost four years and more than \$15 billion into her giving spree, the philanthropist is fairly tight-lipped about her grantees. She writes on occasion about her goals — to boost economic mobility and lift up disenfranchised people chief among them. But she provides few clues about why she has bestowed funds upon a specific organization. In December, she announced her latest round of giving — more than \$2.1 billion — with just three sentences.

Now, however, Harvard researchers have mined the data from Yield Giving, the website where Scott has documented each of her 1,964 gifts. For nearly 1,200 groups with tax filings and publicly disclosed Scott gifts, they also crossed that data with Internal Revenue Service information about the organizations' size and cause.

Their analysis — which includes nearly \$10 billion in grants — is the best window yet into the types of organizations favored by the maverick philanthropist. The researchers don't intend the work to be a "mind-reading exercise," says Matthew Lee of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. Rather, they hope it's a baseline for a study of the natural experiment Scott has created: how large, unrestricted gifts affect a nonprofit's finances and outcomes and those of similar groups.

"We want to see what happens over the next three to five years as organizations ingest the capital, spend it and grow, put some aside for a rainy day and see if that has a differential effect on those who got it and those who didn't," says Brian Trelstad, who teaches at the Harvard Business School and is a partner at Bridges Fund Management, an impact investing fund.

Still, clear trends and themes from Scott's philanthropy jump out from the Harvard research and the Yield Giving data:

Each year seems to bring a new focus.

Scott's essays about her philanthropy indicate she's faithfully stuck to the goals she announced at the outset, Lee says. She's consistently directed gifts to education (\$2.4 billion of the \$10 billion that Harvard researchers analyzed) and human services (\$1.2 billion), for instance.

But each year she appears to back a new type of organization to leverage change. In 2020, she gave \$560 million to 23 historically Black colleges and universities. But Scott's accounting of gift

recipients last year included only two HBCUs — the medical schools at Howard (\$12 million) and Morehouse (undisclosed).

Scott's giving to housing efforts started relatively small and grew exponentially in 2022. That year, she gave \$436 million to Habitat for Humanity and its chapters. Her list for 2023 doesn't include Habitat groups but features a number of big gifts to trusts that fund the creation and rehabilitation of affordable housing. Among the recipients: the Champlain Housing Trust in Vermont (\$20 million), the San Francisco Community Land Trust (\$20 million), and the City of Lakes Community Land Trust (\$10 million) in Minneapolis.

Notable in Scott's 2023 announcement of gifts: The Harvard researchers analyzed a little more than half of the \$2.1 billion in donations that Scott announced in December. She directed the largest share — at least \$278 million — to health care organizations, especially community providers. At least 114 of her 360 gifts aimed to increase access to health care, according to Yield Giving. The bulk of those went to U.S. organizations, but 10 work abroad.

She gives to an unusually large range of groups and causes.

Scott gave across every category of organization over the four years, Lee says. "It seems clear that she was trying to make sure that money went to all 50 states." A few cause areas, however, have attracted relatively little of her support, among them science and religion.

Notable in 2023: Yield Giving listed gifts to organizations in the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and every state but seven — Delaware, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, South Carolina, South Dakota, and Wyoming, though groups in those states have received gifts before. It also noted grants to nonprofits working across the country or regionally that presumably touched those seven.

Also, 67 of the 360 announced gifts went to organizations working outside the United States.

Scott embraces the South more than most major philanthropists.

In December 2022, when Scott first made a full list of her contributions available, a *Chronicle*

GIVING

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SCOTT'S TOP PRIORITIES

Grants in millions

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Education – \$2.4B	\$742	\$923	\$617	\$128
Human services – \$1.2B	\$567	\$253	\$243	\$136
Health care – \$935M	\$80	\$115	\$462	\$278
Housing & shelter – \$585M	\$32	\$7	\$384	\$162

Note: Reflects amounts for 1,190 of Scott's 1,964 grants during 2020-23. Other recipients didn't disclose gift amounts or couldn't be linked to an IRS tax filing. Causes are based on IRS category definitions.

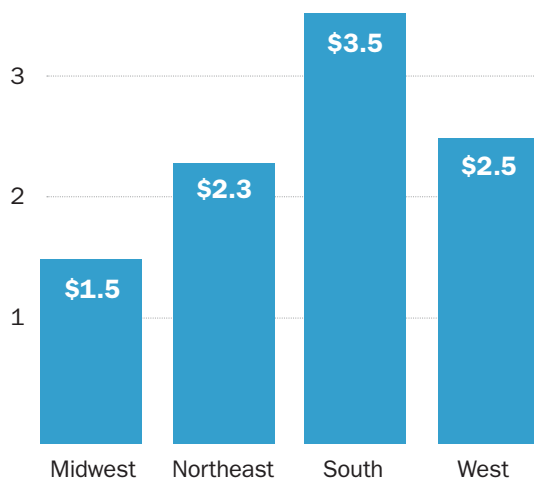
Source: Harvard Business School's "Working Knowledge"

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analysis found that she had earmarked at least \$3.1 billion of her \$10.6 billion in disclosed gifts to date for organizations in southern states. The Harvard researchers confirmed a southern bent to her giving, noting that 19 of 39 organizations that have received at least \$30 million are head-

GIVING WITH A SOUTHERN ACCENT

Scott's grants by region (in billions)



Note: Reflects amounts for 1,190 of Scott's 1,964 grants during 2020-23. Other recipients didn't disclose gift amounts or couldn't be linked to an IRS tax filing.

Source: Harvard Business School's "Working Knowledge"

quartered in the South.

Altogether, Scott has earmarked 563 grants for southern organizations, according to Yield Giving.

Notable in 2023: This past year, she made multimillion-dollar gifts to legal-aid organizations and housing groups in the southern states as well as more than 40 gifts to programs designed to increase access to health care. At least five health centers received grants of \$5 million each: in Brownsville, Tex.; Dallas; the Appalachian region of Kentucky; eastern North Carolina; and the rural Eastern Shore of Virginia.

Scott funds a lot of midsize and large organizations.

Nearly 45 percent of her gifts have gone to

groups with budgets of at least \$10 million. Revenue for Scott grantees averaged nearly \$27 million, five times that of the nonprofit average, according to the Harvard research.

Scott has faced criticism for showering well-resourced organizations with gifts. Last year, she issued a call for proposals from organizations with \$1 million to \$5 million in revenue. That's still a relatively large budget, but such groups don't typically win big gifts from billionaire megadonors.

Notable in 2023: Scott gave \$25 million to each of three organizations with revenue of \$40 million or more: Mercy Housing (\$45 million in revenue in 2021, according to its latest tax filings); Upstream USA (\$80 million in 2022), which aims to reduce unplanned pregnancies; and the job-training group Year Up (\$179 million).

She likes giving to affiliates of national nonprofits. Or does she?

About one-third of Scott's grantees are part of national networks such as Communities in Schools, Easterseals, Girl Scouts, Meals on Wheels, and Planned Parenthood. Yet in 2023, none of the recipient organizations were affiliates, according to the Harvard research.

What's more, she limited recipients of this year's \$250 million round of gifts to "community-led, community-focused organizations," according to the announcement of the open call. Those organizations may be part of a national network, but it doesn't appear likely that she'll spread money to dozens of linked groups. ■

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SCOTT'S LEAST FAVORITE CAUSES

Total grant making, 2020-23

Science & technology	\$18 million
Religion	\$16 million
Medical research	\$5 million
Animal welfare	\$1 million

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Source: Harvard Business School's "Working Knowledge"