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Donors Give LESS When More Analytic Say Researchers

IPA Research Affiliate John List was quoted in an article in Nonprofit Quarterly examining donor behavior.

Excerpt:

John List, an economist at the University of Chicago has tested matching programs for their capacity to encourage people to give more. List found that a matching program did inspire more people to give, but offering a higher matching ratio decidedly did not lead to larger donations. People whose donations would be quadrupled gave the same amount as people whose donations would simply be doubled. “People get utility or satisfaction out of giving to a good cause. And they do not care how much public good is provided,” concluded List.

One theory about why people are less likely to give if they are more analytical has to do with what is termed here the “drop in the bucket effect,” or the sudden realization that one's contribution pales in the face of overwhelming need. “If you really did the calculus,” List said, “my 25 dollars to the Sierra Club means nothing on the margins. So if I wanted to be really analytical about it, I'm not going to give.” List asserts that it follows that encouraging donors to give to the most efficient, best organizations might mean that less money actually gets donated.

[Read the full article.](#)

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