

# From Compassion to Convergence: Drivers of Donations in Disaster Response and Their Impacts in Humanitarian Logistics Systems

**Matheus de Souza and Tricia Wachtendorf**  
Disaster Research Center, University of Delaware

## Methods

We conducted a structured narrative review that integrates behavioral and operational research on disaster donations, linking why individuals and firms give to how those inflows interact with humanitarian logistics and material convergence. The review draws on English-language, peer-reviewed studies identified through searches in Semantic Scholar and Google Scholar. Our process is detailed below:

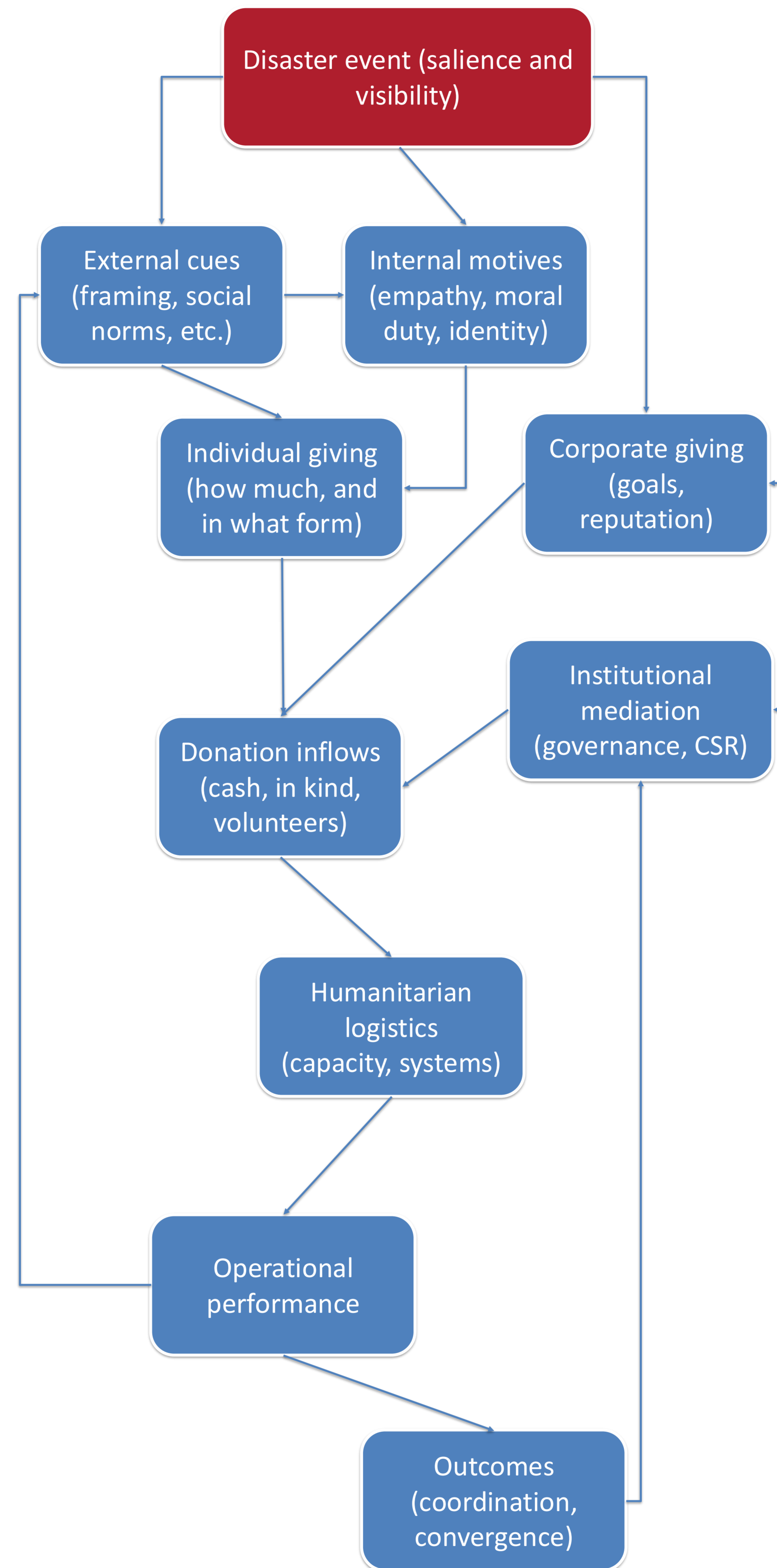
- We reviewed 205 English-language, peer-reviewed studies (2000–2025), with the synthesis emphasizing 2010 onward while retaining foundational works.
- We organized the literature into two clusters: giving behavior (individual and corporate) and supply chain dynamics/material convergence.
- We extracted evidence on drivers, donation form and timing (cash vs in-kind), and operational effects across receiving, sorting/triage, storage, transport, and last-mile delivery.
- We synthesized these findings into an integrated model linking behavioral and institutional drivers to operational choke points and outcomes (effective assistance vs material convergence).

## The integrated donation framework

The framework begins with the disaster event, which increases salience and visibility and draws public attention to urgent needs in the event context. Salience activates internal motives such as empathy, moral duty, and identity, while external cues such as media framing, social norms, and platform design influence what kind of help seems appropriate. Corporate giving follows a related but distinct path, influenced by humanitarian concern, organizational goals, legitimacy, governance, and reputation. Together, these behavioral and institutional pressures generate donation inflows that enter the humanitarian response system. Their effects depend on logistics capacity, especially the ability to receive, sort, store, transport, coordinate, and distribute aid.

## What does the framework help to illustrate?

- 1** Donations do not help or harm at the moment they are given; their effects depend on how they move through the response system.
- 2** A donation can be useful or a problem, depending on whether it matches what is needed, when it arrives, and whether agencies can handle it.
- 3** When needs, public messages, and logistics are aligned, donations support the response; when they are not, they create delays, duplication, and material convergence



**Figure. Integrated model of disaster giving and its operational consequences.**



Unsolicited donations dumped on muddy sidewalk in Queens, NY after Hurricane Sandy.

## Applications

Disaster giving should be planned for as a predictable operational flow. The central challenge is the misalignment between donor behavior, institutional coordination, and logistics capacity. In this sense, organizations should:

- 1. Guide donation behavior before goods enter the system:** Responding organizations should use trusted messengers (agents), repeated public guidance, and clear donation platforms to steer donors toward cash, local purchasing, or specifically requested goods.
- 2. Match donation appeals to logistics capacity:** Appeals should be based on real-time information about what agencies can receive, sort, store, transport, and distribute, so public generosity does not create congestion or delay.
- 3. Build coordination systems for unsolicited inflows:** VOADs, emergency managers, nonprofits, and private-sector partners should pre-identify intake rules, sorting thresholds, storage limits, referral pathways, and information-sharing procedures before disasters occur.

## Conclusion

Disaster giving operates as a system linking donor behavior, institutional incentives, and logistics capacity. Individual giving is shaped by salience, affect, norms, and perceived efficacy, which influences donation form and timing. Corporate giving is filtered through governance, legitimacy, and signaling pressures, influencing scale and modality of donations. Material convergence emerges when “push” inflows, especially unsolicited in-kind goods, exceed absorptive capacity across receiving, sorting/triage, storage, transport, and last-mile delivery. The main risk identified is misalignment between inflows and capacity.

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## References

Please find the complete reference list here:



## Contact

Matheus de Souza: matsouza@udel.edu  
Tricia Wachtendorf: twachten@udel.edu



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CENTER**

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