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Philanthropy and Indigenous Initiatives: Insights From Australian Donors

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ABSTRACT

This paper draws on a survey and interview data, collected from a group of 180 donors who made monetary gifts to an Australian higher education institution, to better understand what drives individuals and organisations to donate to Indigenous initiatives. The analysis helped to identify five types of donors: the Advocate and Prescriptive donors, the supporter types who donate to Australian Indigenous initiatives and the Constrained, Reserved and Opposing donors, non-supporter types who withhold from donating to such initiatives. The results show a wide range of motivations, varied attitudes and multiple perceived barriers to donating to Australian Indigenous initiatives. The study reveals that while some donors do engage and reflect on issues around the role of philanthropy in achieving positive outcomes for Indigenous people, others' motivations and barriers to donating confirm the concerns of scholars who have shown how philanthropy can maintain inequality and colonial practices. This paper also provides practical implications for developing a reflexive approach to philanthropy that supports Indigenous initiatives.

1 | Introduction

Philanthropy is growing in policy significance, with governments in many countries seeking to encourage private funds for public purposes as well as philanthropic organisations to strategically invest in social policy and welfare (Harvey et al. 2021; Lambin and Surender 2023; Williamson et al. 2017). It is seen as addressing a gap in government funding, especially in servicing the needs of Indigenous peoples (Cornell and Jorgensen 2020; Smyllie et al. 2011; Smyllie and Scaife 2010, 2011). For example, the Australian Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Philanthropy (2023, 11) noted that:

> As an important source of revenue, philanthropic giving enables NFPs [not for profits] to be an alternate service provider to government or to provide services that governments do not. [...] This may be particularly important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

people, where some government-provided services may not be preferred, well targeted or best suited to them or their communities.

Indigenous people make up 6.2% of the world's population. This group of people is significantly underrepresented in philanthropic funding. While large donations to Indigenous initiatives have increased in the US, Canada and Australia, support for Indigenous initiatives remains low compared with other causes (Smyllie and Scaife 2010, 2011; Scaife 2006; Wotherspoon 2014). The low levels of philanthropic giving mean that important Indigenous initiatives are underfunded and poorly serviced (Government of Canada 2023; Mongabay 2023; Education New Zealand 2023).

Several reasons have been proposed for the low levels of philanthropic donations to Indigenous initiatives, including organisational capacity, a focus on established relationships, and

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a lack of community understanding of Indigenous cultures and needs (Smyllie and Scaife 2010, 2011; Scaife 2006). Little is, however, known about attitudes towards philanthropic donations to support Indigenous communities, programmes and activities (Dreise 2018), especially Australian Indigenous initiatives.

Philanthropy Australia (2021, 1) defines philanthropy as 'the giving of money, time, information, goods and services, influence and voice to improve the wellbeing of humanity and the community'. While philanthropy is commonly defined as a wide spectrum of activities, some studies have highlighted a tendency to focus on monetary donations as the primary form of giving. This is linked to a range of factors, including charitable organisation's preference for money over time, government incentives for financial donations, corporate giving and the need to assess and report on impact that relies heavily on quantifiable data from financial contribution (Bekkers and Wiepking 2011; Costello and Malkoc 2022; Sargeant and Crissman 2006).

As philanthropy is seen as a powerful tool for change, the competition is strong for the limited funds it provides, especially during periods of increased economic and social stress (Waller and Morgan 2022). An ability to understand philanthropic behaviour and donor motivators is, therefore, extremely valuable.

It is often argued that philanthropy is well established in Australia because of a dominant egalitarian ethos, and 'a history of apparent unease about extravagant wealth, a sense of privacy about personal convictions, and expectations of a significant role for government in the provision of basic services' (Williamson et al. 2017, 289). On the other hand, Australia is a settler colonial country that was founded on the legal precept of 'terra nullius' (nobody's land), and a nation built on exclusionary laws and policies. These policies deprived Indigenous Australians of the right to be counted as part of the population's census and to vote until the late 1960s. Furthermore, until 1966, the 'White Australia Policy' limited migration to Australia to people with European backgrounds (Tavan 2005).

This long history of discrimination is still affecting the lives of Indigenous Australians today as evidenced by the lack of significant progress in 'Closing the Gap' in opportunities and outcomes in the areas of health, education and employment (Commonwealth of Australia 2024; Close the Gap 2023). Moreover, the rejection of the 'Voice to Parliament' Referendum that sought to amend the Australian Constitution to recognise Indigenous Australians as the First Nations Peoples, among other things, reinforced this issue (Australians for Indigenous Constitutional Recognition 2023).

Drawing on quantitative and qualitative data from a pool of donors who made monetary gifts to an Australian higher education institution (HEI), including towards Indigenous initiatives, we sought to better understand attitudes towards philanthropic donations in support of Indigenous initiatives. More specifically, our study aimed to address the questions: (i) What are the motivations for donating to Indigenous initiatives? (ii) Who donates to Indigenous initiatives? (iii) What are the barriers to donating to Indigenous initiatives? The findings of this exploratory study

and interplay between the qualitative and quantitative data elements provide a more nuanced understanding and deeper insight into the types of donors and the diverse factors that influence philanthropic behaviour in this context.

To examine what motivates or prevents individuals and organisations to donate to Indigenous initiatives in Australia, this paper first provides an overview of the scholarly literature on motivations for donating and on philanthropy towards Indigenous initiatives. Second, the study's method is outlined, which includes the analysis of survey and interview data collected from a group of 180 donors who made monetary gifts towards the education and research initiatives of an Australian HEI, including to its Indigenous initiatives. The study's findings of five groups of donors according to their motivations and barriers to donating to Indigenous initiatives are then presented. Finally, the relationship between donors' attitudes towards donating to Indigenous initiatives and the use of philanthropy to maintain inequality or address power asymmetries in resources and relationships between Indigenous recipients and non-Indigenous donors is discussed.

2 | Literature Review

A review of the literature on individual and organisations' motivations to donate reveals different concerns when studying donating to causes (e.g., health, education and animal welfare) as opposed to donating to initiatives that support the well-being and advancement of marginalised people (e.g., Indigenous people).

2.1 | Philanthropic Motivations

Motivations to donate have long been the focus of research that has resulted in various typologies. The typology of 10 motivations given in Figure 1 brings together a range of 'altruistic' (i.e., for others' benefit) and 'egotistic' (i.e., benefiting the donor) motivations identified elsewhere (e.g., Bekkers and Wiepking 2011; Waller and Morgan 2022). Motivations can be linked to psychological, social and/or economic factors. These motivations can also be associated with national and institutional philanthropic contexts as they are shaped by local regulatory and legislative frameworks, professional standards and social practices (Wiepking et al. 2021). While some individuals and organisations may have a strong motivation to donate, their decision to donate tends to be informed by several factors that may change over time (Productivity Commission 2023).

There can also be motivations not to donate. These can be prompted by a reluctance to be exposed to 'negative' publicity surrounding certain causes or negative press (Bekkers 2022) or people's political views, especially populist values (McAllister and Makkai 2021). Furthermore, extrapolating from Hu et al.'s (2024) analysis of how negatively and positively framed appeals influence donors' motivation to give, it could be said that negatively framed charitable advertisements tend to narrow potential and actual donors' cognitive scope. This then favours dependency-oriented appeals that create associations between simplistic factors, such as between poverty and donating food.
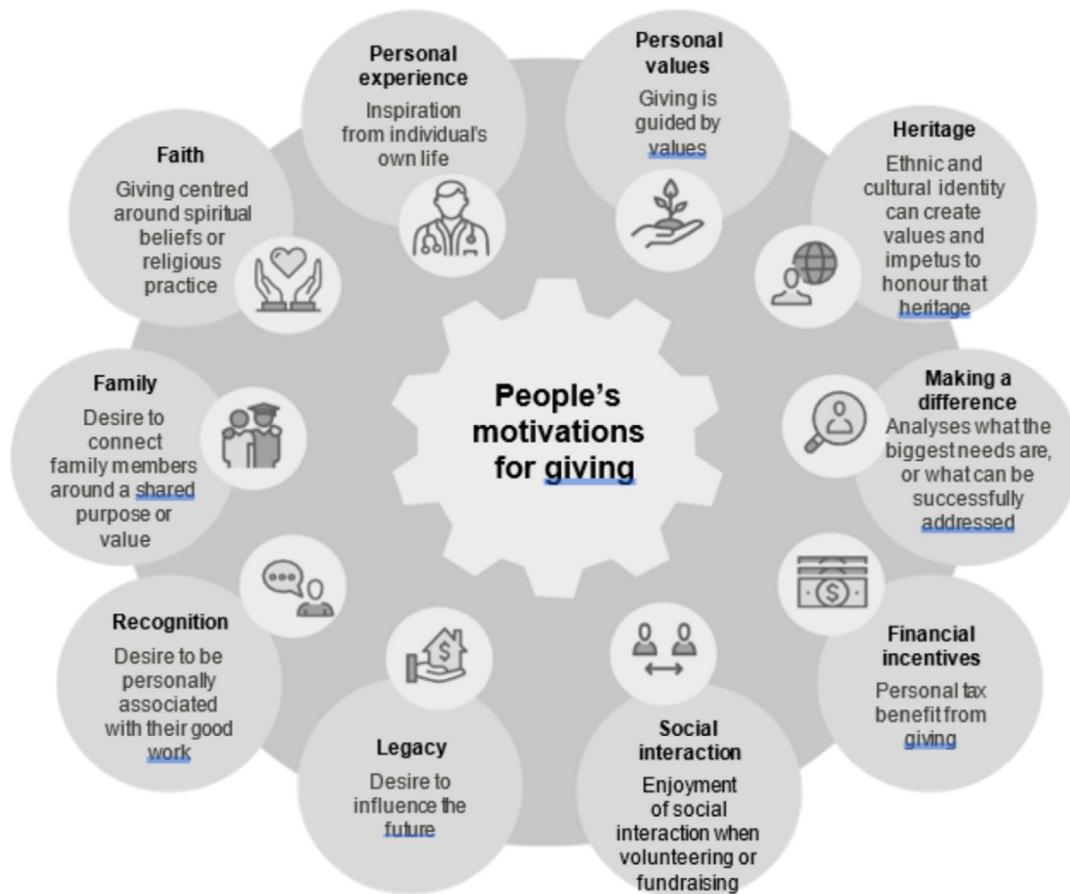
FIGURE 1 | Typology of motivations for giving (Productivity Commission 2023, 10).

2.2 | Motivations for Giving to Indigenous Initiatives

Research into the motivations to donate to Indigenous initiatives has highlighted the 'dark side' of philanthropy. It has shown how past philanthropic actions presented as acts of generosity have supported the accumulation of wealth through imperialist and capitalist exploitative and extractive practices, which have led to the maintenance of social inequalities (Bekkers 2022; Martin 2018). In particular, several studies have identified issues with individual and organisations' motivations to donate to Indigenous initiatives, such as power imbalance between donors and recipients, which might come from top-down approaches and/or lack of cultural understanding resulting in misunderstanding of needs, imposed solutions and reduced levels of control and autonomy for those receiving philanthropic funds (Smyllie and Scaife 2010, 2011; Scaife 2006; Scott-Enns 2020). In Australia, an examination of the motivations for giving to Indigenous initiatives highlighted philanthropic organisations' commitment to reconciliation and the recognition of the need to address injustices (Philanthropy Australia 2023; Smyllie and Scaife 2011). This can extend to donors choosing to only fund Indigenous-led initiatives, initiatives that support self-determination and empowerment and/or recipient organisations that are intent on moving towards decolonising philanthropy.

Jones's (2017) investigation into Indigenous giving in Australia, however, also reveals problematic attitudes and actions. The author identified a relationship between negative stereotypes of Indigenous Australians and paternalistic giving that imposes conditions to control donations and recipients. Based on an experimental study where donors were given the choice to donate to one of three recipient types (disadvantaged Indigenous Australians in remote Australia, disadvantaged non-Indigenous Australians in Australian suburban communities and disadvantaged people in an overseas developing country), they found that 'the probability of donors choosing to donate to Indigenous Australians [...] increases when donors can act paternalistically to ensure their donation will not be misspent' (Jones 2017, 430).

2.3 | Decolonising Philanthropy

Scholars have argued for the urgent need to address the paternalism, othering of communities, power-hoarding and failure to recognise structural racism that inadvertently, or otherwise, perpetuate different forms of inequality and ensure philanthropy is informed by a social justice agenda and practices (Scott and King 2019). This has led to calls to decolonise philanthropy, which is defined as 'a provocative exploration of the dysfunctional colonial dynamics at play in the world of high finance and philanthropy' (Martin 2018, 2).

In Australia, as in the US and Canada with a similar history of invasion and exploitation of native lands and resources, paternalism intersects with colonialism. In these contexts, philanthropy can be seen as the contemporary means of maintaining settler colonial systems (Rolland 2020). Decolonising philanthropy in

settler colonies, however, presents major challenges as decolonisation cannot be separated from the features of settler colonialism and leads to contradicting decolonial desires (Yang and Wayne 2012).

While some philanthropic organisations have started to reflect on how their giving may perpetuate colonialism and the problems they aim to solve, Banerjee and Shriram (2022) and Martin (2018) believe that decolonising an inherently colonial system is impossible. One reason for this is that it is an uncomfortable task that requires not only challenging the Western-centric business model of philanthropy based on colonial framings, but also privilege and power asymmetry. Another challenge is not just to decolonise but to indigenise first. This means reconciling with the past and present broken connections through truth-telling activities and an epistemological and ontological recentring that values Indigenous knowledge and ways of being (Angarova and Francour 2021; Scott et al. 2020).

2.4 | Knowledge Gaps

While there is a growing body of literature on philanthropy for Indigenous initiatives, many research gaps remain in several key areas. A major gap is the limited understanding of what motivates individuals and organisations to donate to Indigenous initiatives as well as donors' attitudes and perceptions towards Indigenous communities (Smyllie and Scaife 2011). The wide range of issues surrounding philanthropy in Indigenous contexts, including the maintenance of power imbalances and colonial practices and how to respectfully embed Indigenous perspectives and values in philanthropic activities that seek to support Indigenous initiatives and communities, is also an under-researched area (Scott et al. 2020; Smyllie and Scaife 2011). Furthermore, there is a need to examine the barriers to Indigenous philanthropy grant-making and funding (Smyllie et al. 2011). This study sought to address some of these gaps.

3 | Method

The study adopted a mixed-methods and reflexive approach.

3.1 | A Reflexive Approach

The authors were commissioned to conduct the study by the HEI's philanthropic and Indigenous units. As a team of non-Indigenous researchers, we took heed of Raciti (2023) request to acknowledge our positionality and reasons for researching an issue that pertains to Indigenous Australians. Our interest in this work is as multiple as we are diverse in our professional—from across the social sciences—and personal backgrounds—a mix of Australian-born and first-generation migrants, women and men from Anglo-Celtic and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and with roots in colonisers and colonised pasts.

At an academic level, four of the authors' have had a long-term involvement in teaching university subjects in Indigenous Business and Education programmes (Chan et al. 2023), as well as being involved in the study of Indigenous research methods

(Waller et al. 2020, 2021). At a personal level, a drive to address issues of social justice and equity for the historically marginalised and disadvantaged group of First Nations Peoples in Australia ties us all together. In addition, the undertaking of the study at a time when the Referendum on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 'Voice to Parliament'—which sought in part to amend the Australian Constitution to recognise Indigenous Australians as the First Nations Peoples and failed to get a majority of in October 2023—made us acutely aware of the complexity of acknowledging Australia's Black history and advancing Indigenous interests in Australia.

To make sense of our findings, we turned to reflexive sociology as it is a useful theoretical approach for researchers to consider the complexity and implications of their relationship to the phenomenon they are studying (Wacquant 1989; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). This approach was adopted to ensure we questioned our role and identity as researchers in the production of academic and practice-based knowledge (Gilmore and Kenny 2015) and that our work does not reproduce colonial processes (Raciti 2023). By making explicit our position in relation to our study, we were able to engage with our research questions and data collected in the full knowledge of the colonial past of the country, our immediate and ancestral links to that history, and how it impacts the present of Indigenous Australians and what contribution the study can make to Indigenous peoples and cultures.

3.2 | Data Collection

This study adopted a mixed methods approach to collect data about donors' attitudes, motivations and barriers to philanthropy that influence donations towards Indigenous initiatives.

An online survey was used to gather data from individual and organisation donors who made or had the capacity to make small to large donations. Survey participants were recruited via an email sent to current, lapsed and prospective donors to an Australian HEI. The online survey was designed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data as a means of providing a wholistic perspective on participants' attitudes, motivations and barriers to making or continuing to make donations in the future. Survey questions were developed based on industry samples, including the Leading Learning in Education and Philanthropy survey (Anderson and Curtin 2011) and the attitudes and practices concerning effective philanthropy survey (Ostrower 2004). Specifically, the survey included six sections that sought data about their general philanthropic practices and about donating to Indigenous initiatives. The survey collected data on: (i) the philanthropic giving context and vision; (ii) general philanthropic giving motivations and trends; (iii) motivations and trends in making donations to Indigenous initiatives and (iv) donations to universities; (v) making large-scale donations; and (vi) what makes for successful giving (Data S1).

To complement and crossreference the survey data, the study also used data collected from semi-structured interviews. Interview questions were designed to elicit rich data about motivations, characteristics of an individual/organisation's donation activity, effective approaches and levels of engagement

post-donation. A purpose sampling approach was adopted to recruit and select interview participants. Survey participants were invited to opt-in to take part in an interview via the survey. Those who self-nominated were added to a list of potential interviewees from which interviewees were selected based on their availability 1 week in December 2023. Interviews were conducted by a member of the research team. Each interview lasted approximately 30 min and was held online. Interviews were recorded and transcribed using voice-recognition software (VRS). The VRS generated transcripts which were then 'cleaned up' by the interviewer to ensure accuracy. Transcripts were de-identified to protect participants' anonymity.

Data were collected in November 2023 from 180 people (168 individuals and 12 nonindividuals) via a survey and 10 people via interview. Participants were individual and nonindividual donors who did not identify as Indigenous. Individuals included employees at all levels of organisations and types of industry and retirees. The nonindividuals represented a mix of Foundations, Trusts, Funds, small businesses and corporations. They were broadly represented, including by people across different positions, including CEO, Programme Manager, Board Chair or Member and External/Community Engagement Manager. A total of 75% of nonindividual participants operated in a workplace with less than 99 employees. All the donors who participated in the survey and interviews had made donations to the HEI, but not all had donated to support Indigenous initiatives.

3.3 | Data Analysis

A statistical analysis was carried out on the quantitative data collected via the survey. The analysis focussed on the relationship between donors' demographics, broader philanthropic preferences and donation capacity/size. The results were divided into individual and nonindividual (e.g., trusts, funds, foundations, corporations and small businesses) donors.

Qualitative data collected via the survey's open-ended questions and the interviews were coded using NVivo12. Data were initially categorised around the themes of 'who donate' or 'who does not donate' to Indigenous initiatives, 'why' or 'why not', and 'what causes' they donate to. Within these categories, we then used a reflexive thematic analysis approach to surface subthemes about philanthropic actions (Braun and Clarke 2012).

The qualitative analysis was done in conversation with the quantitative analysis, going back and forth to reflect on and draw meaning from one in relation to the other. The subthemes constructed from the analysis highlighted several donor profiles around those who support and those who do not support Indigenous initiatives and their donor history, goals, motivations, decision-making processes, expectations and relationship

with the HEI. Two additional subthemes emerged around participants' reflections on philanthropic experiences and philanthropic management and practices. The themes and subthemes are presented in Section 4. In line with ethical protocols and approvals (insert HREC reference), pseudonyms have been used in what follows to protect participants' identities.

4 | Results

The results focus on the motivation and barriers to donating to Australian Indigenous initiatives. The analysis of the survey and interview data reveals five distinct groupings of donors who donate and do not donate to Indigenous initiatives. Three groups of donors were found who did not donate to Indigenous initiatives: (i) Constrained, (ii) Reserved and (iii) Opposing donors. The two groups of donors who donated to Indigenous initiatives were: (i) Prescriptive and (ii) Advocate donors. In Figure 2, we illustrate these groupings along a donor classification spectrum. Our findings also reveal a rich and complex outline of reasons and justifications for and against making monetary donations to Indigenous initiatives and under what conditions. The remainder of this paper provides a detailed analysis of these.

4.1 | Nonsupporters

From the analysis of the data, three types of nonsupporters of Indigenous initiatives were identified and classified as Constrained, Reserved and Opposing donors.

4.1.1 | Donor Types

4.1.1.1 | Constrained Donors. Constrained donors were not against donating to Indigenous initiatives, but had not done so because of limited resources. For example, Muriel was a retired arts education specialist. She had close ties with the HEI as an alumnus and through family members who studied at the HEI. She had a long history of donating, role-modelled by her family of 'socially responsible people'. With her husband, Murial had set an annual quota of donations that was used for her monthly small and medium donations to about seven organisations and for occasional donations to disaster relief initiatives, as the need arose. She was also a volunteer and did pro bono work for several community-based organisations. If Muriel had the capacity, she would support an Indigenous initiative as she trusted the HEI and its innovative approach.

Arthur was a sole trader IT specialist who had consulted for the HEI. He was a recent donor. His philanthropic history started about 4 years prior to the interview because an Indigenous
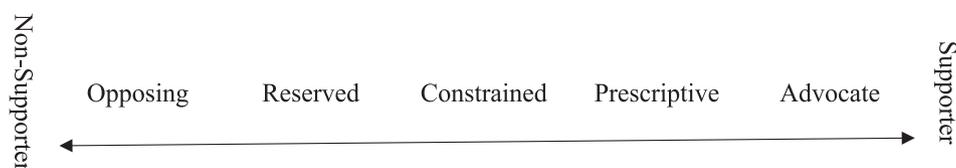

FIGURE 2 | Donor type according to their level of support.

initiative was recommended to him by another trusted organisation. He made donations through his business because of the tax incentive. His other motivations to donate were linked to his personal experience related to a health issue and having worked in remote areas close to Indigenous communities. He made regular small donations to three organisations and would donate to Indigenous initiatives if they centred on his causes of choice (i.e., health or education programmes in Indigenous remote communities).

4.1.1.2 | Reserved Donors.

Reserved donors were not donating to Indigenous initiatives because of their reservations about the cultural and structural inadequacy of philanthropic practices in achieving the type of change they aspired to. For example, Stacey was a retired self-employed architect. She had a prior connection with the HEI through a family member who is a former staff member of the HEI. She had a long history of donating to education and children's health initiatives. She was motivated to donate because of her personal values and seeing philanthropy modelled by her parents. She tended to make larger donations through her superannuation fund, which operates as an ancillary fund. She would have donated to an Indigenous initiative if it were more than an economic initiative and provided additional (community) support to the students.

Paul was a retired technical specialist with no prior links to the HEI. He had a long history of donating to social justice, humanitarian or disaster relief and environmental initiatives. Following in his father's footsteps, he started donating when he began working. He was motivated by his family and tended to donate small amounts regularly to between five and eight organisations that have a global and national reach. Paul would have donated to Indigenous initiatives if they were Indigenous-led and run, and the initiative had a genuine/meaningful connection with communities.

Nathan was an executive in a finance services company who graduated from the HEI and was actively involved in philanthropy through fundraising activities and pro bono work. He had a long history of donating that was triggered by his personal experience of his local community rallying to support his family when his father died, leaving his mother to raise her young children. He regularly made small to large donations, on occasional and regular bases, to five organisations, including the HEI, that addressed his priority causes of education, health, sport/community well-being and connectedness, and equality in the workplace. His donation did not go towards Indigenous initiatives because he needed to be convinced that the donation would make a difference beyond an immediate economic relief:

> Why is the organisation focusing on Indigenous people or Indigenous groups? It might sound counterintuitive or ironic, but I love to hear why the organisation will benefit from this. That's ironic, that it sounds counterintuitive. doesn't it? This is meant to be a charitable exercise. Yes, it is. But it's meant to be a thoughtful exercise. It's meant to be a funded exercise. It's not meant to be a benevolent exercise.

4.1.1.3 | Opposing Donors.

Opposing donors did not donate to Indigenous initiatives because they considered such initiatives to be outside of their responsibility or because they had no confidence in the management skills of Indigenous-led organisations (discussed further in 4.1.3 Barriers to donating to Indigenous initiatives). For instance, Julian was an international alumnus and an Honorary Fellow of the HEI. He lived overseas and was an executive in a global entertainment company. While Julian believed in the power of philanthropy, actively raised funds to tackle homelessness, and made large donations to the HEI, he did not donate to Indigenous initiatives as it was outside of his cause of choice. Another example of an opposing donor is illustrated by the quote from a survey participant, who did not see it within philanthropy's remit to address Indigenous issues:

> The removal of the root causes sounds fantastic, but it may be out of the control or influence of a philanthropic organisation [...] It is the fundamental duty of governments.

4.1.2 | Donation Priorities

We compared the preferences of constrained, reserved and opposing donors against other donors across a range of causes or initiatives using a $\chi 2$ test (Table 1). Contributions to student scholarships and research programmes were more frequently chosen by constrained donors, while student scholarships were more frequently chosen by opposing donors.

Constrained donors had stronger preferences towards environmental causes, arts and culture and inequality and poverty while Opposing donors had a preference towards environmental causes, arts and culture and health and aged care. For Reserved donors, the preference for arts and culture was the only significant initiative when compared to other donors.

4.1.3 | Barriers to Donating to Indigenous Initiatives

Some participants had clear views about why they would not donate to Indigenous initiatives, drawing on a complex set of motivations and justifications. Figure 3 shows a histogram with confidence intervals of the percentage of participants identifying specific reasons why they have not donated to Indigenous initiatives. The low and high values of the 95% confidence interval represent the likely true population proportions of those donating across the university sector who also do not donate to Indigenous causes. The main barriers included limited resources, lack of awareness and not seeing evidence of potential impact. Concerns over cultural protocols (including fear of not being politically correct), preferences for other causes, and not having been asked were much smaller barriers for these donors.

In addition to the lack of awareness, the lack of evidence that the initiative or the recipient organisation was Indigenous-led, community-driven and/or place-based meant that donors chose to direct their funds elsewhere. Other barriers included the lack of confidence in Indigenous-led organisations to

TABLE 1 | Donor preferences for specific initiatives—constrained, reserved and opposing donors.

Initiatives	χ^2 (asymptotic significance two-sided p)		
	Constrained	**Reserved**	**Opposing**
Student scholarships	12.854 (< 0.001)**	0.519 (0.690)	7.768 (0.005)**
Research programmes	3.494 (0.062)*	0.203 (0.652)	0.159 (0.690)
HEI infrastructure/capital	0.617 (0.432)	0.745 (0.399)	0.007 (0.935)
HEI community events	0.019 (0.890)	0.105 (0.746)	0.002 (0.963)
HEI prizes and awards	0.331 (0.565)	0.005 (0.944)	0.194 (0.659)
Disaster relief	0.085 (0.771)	0.008 (0.928)	0.011 (0.916)
Environmental causes	10.568 (0.001)**	1.509 (0.207)	4.271 (0.039)**
Arts and culture	10.687 (0.001)**	4.456 (0.035)**	5.213 (0.022)**
Health and aged care	1.791 (0.181)	0.057 (0.811)	4.280 (0.039)**
Inequality and poverty	2.721 (0.099)*	0.345 (0.557)	1.843 (0.175)

*Significant at 10%.
**Significant at 5%.
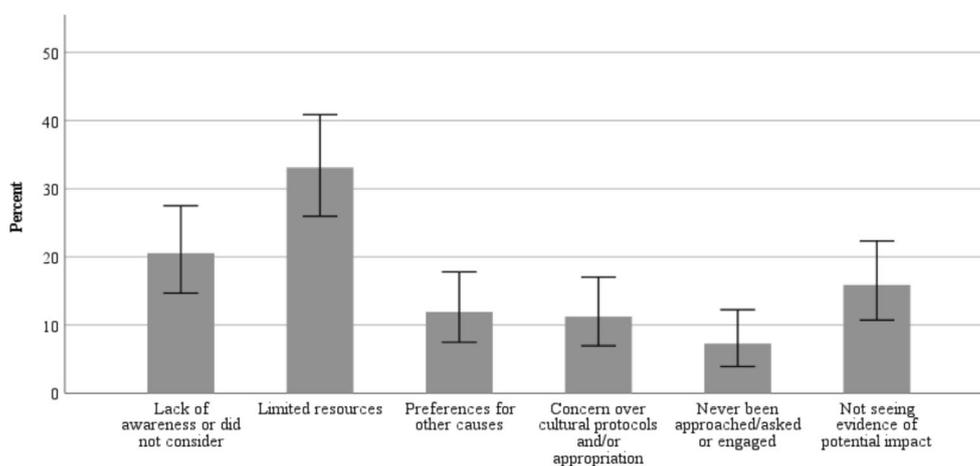
FIGURE 3 | Barriers to donating to Indigenous initiatives.

operate and deliver impact according to Western models and frameworks. Yet another barrier to donating was the perceived role of the government in the initiative, as stated by this survey participant:

> I've discontinued a donation when the group received multi-million dollar assistance from the government, as my contribution was then marginal.

Such statements highlight the belief that, for some, supporting these initiatives was part of the government's responsibility or that the government's involvement no longer warranted philanthropists' support.

4.1.4 | Potential Causes Supported

When participants were asked what Indigenous initiatives they would donate to if the barriers they outlined were overcome, individuals and nonindividuals identified a number of areas they would support (Table 2). Support for 'education and employment'

was a clear priority followed by health, community well-being, environment/caring for Country and Indigenous entrepreneurship. Issues including nation-building, advocacy and data sovereignty were low on participants' agenda.

Table 3 shows the results of an exploratory factor analysis used to identify the underlying dimensions of participants' preferences towards donating to Indigenous causes to examine whether there are natural groupings in the participants' preferred choices.

Overall, the results indicated three distinct factors or groupings of preferences where money would be donated if the barriers to Indigenous donations were overcome. The KMO measure of sampling adequacy was 0.73, which is above the recommended threshold of 0.6, indicating that the sample size was adequate for factor analysis and for the results to be statistically meaningful. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant ($p < 0.001$), confirming that correlations among the variables were sufficient for factor analysis. Based on the confirmatory factor analysis, we defined the three groupings as (i) individual focussed (e.g., education and entrepreneurship);

TABLE 2 | Areas of Indigenous support if barriers to donating are overcome.

Areas	Frequency
Education and employment	26.0
Health	17.2
Well-being	14.8
Environment/caring for Country	11.2
Indigenous entrepreneurship	10.0
Self-determination	9.2
The arts and cultural preservation	5.2
Nation-building/advocacy	3.2
Data sovereignty	1.2
Other	2.0

(ii) community focussed (e.g., nation-building and environment) and (iii) cultural focussed (e.g., cultural preservation and data sovereignty), suggesting that participants have varying preferences on where they would like to see their donations supporting Indigenous initiatives.

4.2 | Supporters

The analysis revealed two types of supporters of Indigenous initiatives: Prescriptive and Advocate donors.

4.2.1 | Donor Types

4.2.1.1 | Prescriptive Donors. Donations from Prescriptive donors came with a range of expectations and caveats. Donald, who worked in a research-related field and had an intermittent history of engagement with philanthropy, illustrates this type of donor profile. He had been an occasional donor to animal welfare organisations since his childhood, but shifted to regular monthly donations in the last 8 years because of an increased capacity to donate and his confirmed trust in a charitable animal welfare organisation. When approached by the HEI where he studied to donate to their Indigenous initiatives, Donald agreed under the condition it was allocated to Indigenous scholarships as that resonated with his personal experience of higher education:

> I've been a student. I did my undergraduate degree at [X]. [...] It can be a bit of a slog. It can be sort of expensive. So, well, yeah, money sort of certainly helps. [...] it's not a direct relationship to me; I'm not Indigenous. [but] because it's the organisation which I know [...] I decided to sign up with the programme.

4.2.1.2 | Advocate Donors. The fifth group of donors was supporters who expressed a desire not only to support Indigenous initiatives, but also more specifically to support self-determination.

TABLE 3 | Confirmatory factor analysis.

	Individual focus	Community focus	Cultural focus
Education and employment	0.913		
Health	0.695		
Well-being	0.488	0.310	
Indigenous entrepreneurship	0.440		
Nation-building/advocacy		0.665	
Self-determination		0.419	
Environment/caring for Country		0.343	
Arts and cultural preservation			0.643
Data sovereignty			0.445

Note: Correlation matrix determinant: 121; KMO: 0.729; Bartlett's test of sphericity: 426.96 ($p < 0.001$).

Donors who had made a philanthropic gift to support an Indigenous initiative included Damian, an Alumnus of the HEI who worked in a financial services company. His donation history spans 18 years. He was a central donor of one of the HEI's scholarship initiatives that supports students to study at the postgraduate level based on merit. He started donating when he was already well into his professional life because his employer at the time had a matching donation scheme. Another turning point in his donation history was when he attended a professional development course where he was asked what he could do to make a difference not to one person's life but to the next generation and the ones after that. His interest in legacy was central to his motivations to donate:

> It's nice to make a decisive difference for one person. The 'buy one get one freebie' is the multi-generational result that you get as well in most cases. So, seeing one investment impact more than one life over, you know, 100 years or 1000 years from now. When people look back and say, this is the first person that went to university, and every person subsequent to that had an opportunity or decided that tertiary education might have been, is the way forward for them. Isn't that a fantastic outcome? That's what I was thinking.

Samir was an Alumnus of the HEI, employed by an energy company. He had a long history of donating influenced by faith and culture. He had, however, only in the past 2 years prior to the interview started to donate to Indigenous initiatives with a focus on health. This was initiated by a professional development session where the facilitator made him aware of Australia's Indigenous

cultures and people's connection to land as well as through his engagement with his company's reconciliation action plan activities.

Amanda was an employee in a philanthropic organisation. She had a prior connection with the HEI as an alumnus. Her long history of donating was informed by her family who were 'community minded'. Her current donation pattern varied between small and large, which predominantly went towards environmental, animal welfare and Indigenous initiatives. She donated to four organisations regularly and to a wide range of initiatives and individuals (e.g., family and friends) on a one-off basis. She was also an active volunteer and keen to encourage a culture of philanthropy:

> The other part of that is encouraging philanthropy more generally. So, I want those organisations to succeed at their efforts. If it's a person I know who's doing fundraising for an organisation, I also want them to be encouraged and successful in their effort, so they do it again.

4.2.2 | Motivations for Donating to Indigenous Initiatives

Some participants' views demonstrated a deficit view of Indigenous people, describing them as 'disadvantaged' and 'vulnerable' students and people. These deficit labels were, however, also often used to refer to students from other higher education underrepresented groups. In some cases, this language reflects attitudes that are indicative of a specific social background and age, but also of an understanding of philanthropy as the actions of a 'good Samaritan'.

Other participants held appreciative and strength-based views of Indigenous people and acknowledged the consequences of Australia's colonial history. For example, some survey participants stated:

> Way before the Referendum, I felt white Australians owe a big commitment to Indigenous people.

> My philanthropic mission is to decolonise this Country led by First Peoples.

> Many years ago, I prioritised giving to not-for-profit organisations that address poverty, and aid in self-determination.

Nonetheless, participants were interested in supporting Indigenous initiatives for a range of reasons. Motivations to donate to Indigenous initiatives included various permutations of the following motivations: knowing that the initiative is Indigenous-led and run, that it made a difference on several levels (e.g., income, employment, health and/or education) to a specific group of people through a genuine connection with the organisation redistributing the funds.

Overall, individuals who made donations in support of Indigenous initiatives were motivated by their personal values

and personal experiences. For nonindividuals, those making decisions to donate were influenced by personal values and by having a lasting impact (legacy).

The top two motivations for both individual and nonindividual donors were personal values and making a difference. Personal experience and legacy factors were the next two important motivations. The two least significant motivations for both groups included reasons of faith and financial incentives (Figure 4).

4.2.3 | Causes Supported

Most individuals in our sample wanted to donate money towards activities that improved educational and employment outcomes as well as health and community wellbeing. Nonindividuals tended to focus their donations on education and health outcomes. Those motivated to donate to Indigenous initiatives because of personal values or to make a difference were mostly drawn to education and employment, health and well-being initiatives as the top three priorities (Table 4).

The desire to make a difference was reported as a strong motivation for supporters of Indigenous initiatives. These participants described their philanthropic goals in terms of wanting to give to initiatives that improved the lives of disadvantaged people and communities because they believed in the power of doing 'good' and caring for others or because it was their 'duty' to do so.

When comparing the preferences of participants who frequently donated to Indigenous initiatives with those who occasionally donated, we found that frequent donors also frequently donated to environmental causes, arts and culture, and inequality and poverty (Table 5). This was significantly different from those who did not donate frequently to Indigenous initiatives by a level of 5%. The results also suggest an alignment of preferences by those who frequently donate to Indigenous causes with the issues that are known to be important to Indigenous people.
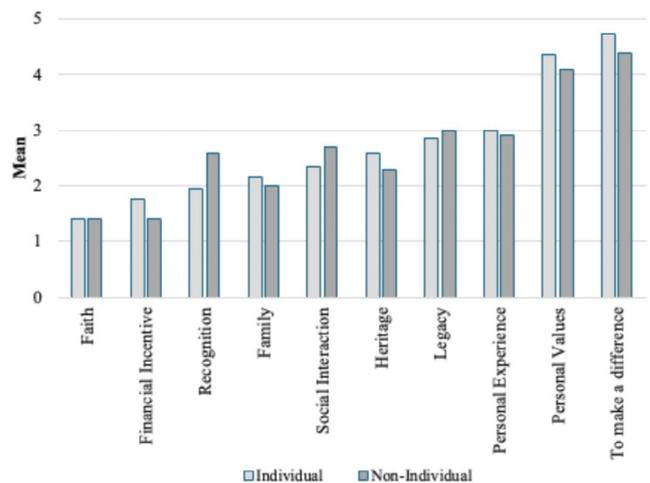

FIGURE 4 | Ranking of motivations to donate to Indigenous initiatives. Scale: 1 = not at all important; 2 = slightly important; 3 = moderately important; 4 = very important; 5 = extremely important.

5 | Discussion

Our analysis revealed that most donors made decisions that were informed by a series of justifications and considerations that fell within the range of motivations shown in Figure 1, oscillating between 'altruistic' and 'egotistic' (Bekkers and Wiepking 2011; Productivity Commission 2023; Waller and Morgan 2022; Wiepking et al. 2021).

Some of the donors motivated by 'altruistic' reasons expressed a desire to donate to Indigenous initiatives as a commitment to reconciliation, based on the recognition of the need to address injustices and support self-determination and empowerment of Indigenous communities and peoples. These donors reflected on the tensions between influence and benevolence and between the use of donations to dictate outcomes and shape recipients rather than to reinforce social connections (Sutterer-Kipping 2022; Lambin and Surender 2023). They discussed what Harvey et al. (2021) call donor ethical stance, defined as their '[o]verarching ethical position that the belief systems that influenced their stance the philanthropist believes to be right and true' (Harvey et al. 2021, 38), and donor ethical systems, which are the belief systems that inform stances.

A few of these altruistically motivated donors also discussed donating to Indigenous initiatives as an ethical dilemma that presented them with 'difficult choices between competing moral imperatives' (Harvey et al. 2021, 38). This was the case for those who were prevented from donating because of their concerns over cultural protocols and/or appropriation. However, we found that underlying this dilemma was an 'egotistic' reason motivated by a fear of not being 'politically correct' more so than a fear of power imbalance in the donor – recipient transaction, which has been the primary concern of scholars who explore how to decolonise philanthropy (Smyllie and Scaife 2011, 2010; Scaife 2006; Scott-Enns 2020).

This intertwining of 'altruistic' and 'egotistic' motivations was particularly apparent for donors who held paternalistic views of philanthropy (Jones 2017). This was the case for nonsupporters, but also for supporters such as the Prescriptive donors who sought to dictate the outcomes of donations and the Advocate donors who held views that underestimated Indigenous recipients' capacity to manage donated funds and achieve positive outcomes.

The ambivalence between 'altruistic' and 'egotistic' reasons was further apparent in the motivations not to donate to Indigenous initiatives. For example, donors who expressed a desire to address environmental, inequality and poverty issues, or support arts and culture, but withheld donations to Indigenous initiatives that had the potential to address these issues within their communities, highlighted the strength of donors' personal values as a primary motivation over a stated desire to make a difference.

Our analysis highlights the complexities that underpin the motivations, attitudes and barriers to donating to Indigenous initiatives. Given that donations can be informed by several motivations across the 'altruistic' and 'egotistic' categories, we propose our five types of donors divided into two groups—the prescriptive and advocate supporters, and the constrained, reserved and opposing nonsupporters—as heuristics. The types are not fixed as donors can move from one group to another over time as well as belong to several groups depending on the cause they support or not. This shows the fine line between supporter and non-supporter of Indigenous initiatives and the obstacles in the way of decolonising philanthropy.

5.1 | Limitations

The intention of this exploratory study was to gather data from donors about their philanthropic actions and strategies towards supporting Indigenous initiatives in Australia. The largest

TABLE 4 | Priorities of donations to Indigenous initiatives.

Initiative	% of donors
Health	12.8
Education and employment	31.4
The arts and cultural preservation	8.7
Self-determination	8.3
Nation building/advocacy	7.4
Community well-being	12.0
Environment/caring for Country	9.5
Choice data sovereignty	0.4
Indigenous entrepreneurship	6.6
Other	2.9

TABLE 5 | Donation preferences of those frequently donating to Indigenous causes.

	χ^2 (asymptotic significance two-sided p)				
	Disaster relief	**Environmental causes**	**Arts and culture**	**Health and aged care**	**Inequality and poverty**
Donating to Indigenous causes	0.126 (0.723)	18.007 (<0.001)**	13.688 (<0.001)**	0.551 (0.458)	10.508 (0.001)**
	Proportion of donations to other causes for participants that frequently donate to Indigenous initiatives				
Donating to Indigenous causes	29.4%	35.09%	38.04%	45.44%	31.93%

**Significant at 5%.

component of the dataset collected was from individuals, and the proportion of organisations (nonindividuals) was a relatively smaller number. Given our convenience sampling of HEI donors from one university, the results may not be entirely representative of the overall donor population in Australia. In addition, while clear preferences, barriers and motivations were apparent, the relatively small sample size and the low concentration of any groups within the nonindividual category from the survey mean that we were unable to make strong statistical inferences between groups.

Moreover, the study revealed further gaps in knowledge about philanthropic actions that support Indigenous initiatives. Further research is needed to test the five groupings of donors, address the dearth of research in an Australian context about motivations for giving to Indigenous initiatives, and the causes, consequences and change points of barriers to giving (including fear of political correctness). Additional research regarding individual giving in Australia could build on the work of Scaife (2006); Bekkers and Wiepking (2011) and Waller (2024) to expand on the findings from this study to produce a robust understanding of donors' philanthropic giving practices to support Indigenous initiatives and the impact of the donations on recipients. In addition, more research is needed to unpack the relationship between sociodemographic characteristics and philanthropy to better understand why some people give more than others, but also trends and predictions for future changes in the size and nature of philanthropy. This research could be extended to focus on large donations by corporations and individuals.

6 | Conclusion

The study found that, in the Australian socioeconomic context, there are similarities in motivations for donating to Indigenous initiatives between individuals and nonindividuals. It also found comparable concerns around the role of philanthropy in supporting Indigenous initiatives as raised by scholars in the US and Canada. Furthermore, the findings reveal key barriers to giving to Indigenous initiatives and growing Indigenous philanthropy.

Some of these barriers to increasing donations to support Indigenous initiatives include the impact of negative stereotypes on donor behaviour and their willingness to consider lower administration costs as reassurance for their donation being best spent. There is concern in general by donors about how donated funds are spent, including whether they are spent correctly or whether the proportion that is spent on administration fees appears excessive. Another barrier to growing Indigenous philanthropy includes the need to address issues of decolonising philanthropy. Indigenous initiatives that seek philanthropic support need to be developed with or by Indigenous people to promote authenticity and relevance, achieve lasting outcomes, and not just perpetuate the very problems the initiatives aim to solve.

Author Contributions

Celina McEwen: conceptualization, funding acquisition, investigation, writing – original draft, methodology, writing – review and editing, formal analysis, project administration, data curation. **Christopher Bajada:** conceptualization, investigation, funding acquisition, writing – original draft, methodology, writing – review and editing, formal analysis, data curation. **Deborah Cotton:** conceptualization, investigation, funding acquisition, writing – original draft, methodology, writing – review and editing, formal analysis, data curation. **Kevin Wallace:** conceptualization, investigation, writing – original draft, methodology, writing – review and editing, formal analysis. **David S. Waller:** conceptualization, investigation, writing – original draft, funding acquisition, methodology, writing – review and editing, formal analysis, data curation.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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