
IMPACT THROUGH INTENTIONALITY

The Effective Donor Principles & Practices



Photo by Howard Buffett

These principles and practices were developed in 2009 and ratified in 2010 by the Donor Effectiveness Network (DEN), a learning community of donor educators and advisors.

To develop the Donor Effectiveness Principles & Practices, DEN members drew upon the frameworks developed by several donor-education programs; the available literature on strategic and effective philanthropy; and members' practical knowledge of the realities of educating and advising donors. The *principles* represent the core tenets of strategic and effective philanthropy; the *practices* represent the philanthropic best practices that give donors the highest likelihood of putting the principles into action and achieving impact.

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation initiated and generously supported DEN during its four years in operation, which ended in 2012.

Principles

It is our shared belief that the following principles represent core tenets of strategic and effective philanthropy and therefore should anchor the curriculum of donor-education programs:

- An orientation toward solving problems
- Clear goals
- A logical strategy for how one's efforts can help achieve those goals, based on a sound analysis of the problem and a grounded theory of how one's efforts can lead to the desired change
- A commitment to continuous learning, including assessing progress and making changes accordingly
- A strong moral and ethical compass, including a commitment to uphold legal and ethical standards and to build respectful relationships with applicants and grantees
- A heartfelt concern for and connection to an issue, cause, or community.

Practices

It is our shared belief that the following practices are “best practices,” flow from the principles above, are aligned with achieving philanthropic impact, and merit inclusion in the curriculum of donor-education programs:

- Focus on a relatively few philanthropic issues or geographical regions. (Focused giving is more likely to lead to impact than spreading one’s giving across a large number of disparate issues or regions.)
- Align your goals and strategies with the financial and human resources—both individual and aggregated—you can bring to bear.
- Whenever possible, engage other funders who may have shared goals. (Donors who “go it alone” often fail to achieve the long-term impact they seek.)
- When developing and refining strategies, seek the input of those who are closest to the problem you’re trying to solve.
- When initiating a new program, strategy, or grant, be prepared to stick with it for a time period that is consistent with the goal. Consider the potential impact of your entrance and exit, and your role in ensuring the sustainability of your investment.
- Gather good information about organizations before you invest (i.e., conduct due diligence).
- Understand how your grant fits into the revenue mix of the organizations you support, and do not require more of organizations than the size of your grant warrants.
- Be transparent about your goals, strategies, and results; communicate clearly and respectfully with applicants and grantees.
- Collect feedback from grantees, beneficiaries, and other stakeholders. Select an assessment methodology that is commensurate with the size and duration of your grants.
- Invest time in assessing the potential unintended consequences of your efforts.
- Invest time in building a network of peers and experts who can help you problem-solve, course-correct, and get better results over time.

Leaders Who Participated in the Donor Effectiveness Network During Some or All of its Four-Year Lifespan

- Laura Arrillaga-Andreessen, Co-founder/Chairman, Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society; Founder/Chairman Emeritus, SV2 (Silicon Valley Social Venture Fund)
- Henry Berman, CEO, Association of Small Foundations
- Melissa Berman, President and CEO, Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors
- Kevin Bolduc, Vice President—Assessment Tools, Center for Effective Philanthropy
- Melissa Bradley, CEO, Tides
- Beth Cohen, Senior Director, Global Philanthropists Circle, Synergos
- Claire Costello, National Foundation Executive for Philanthropic Management, Bank of America Merrill Lynch; Board Member, National Center for Family Philanthropy
- Kathleen Enright, Executive Director, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations
- Ginny Esposito, Founding President, National Center for Family Philanthropy
- Glen Galaich, Executive Director, The Philanthropy Workshop West
- Russ Hall, Managing Partner, Legacy Venture
- Jacob Harold, Program Officer, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
- Peter Hero, Founder and Principal, The Hero Group
- Erica Hunt, President, 21st Century Fund
- Roxie Jerde, CEO, Community Foundation of Sarasota County
- Eric Kessler, Principal and Founder, Arabella Philanthropic Investment Advisors
- Mark Kramer, Managing Director, FSG Social Impact Advisors
- Salvatore LaSpada, Chief Executive, Institute for Philanthropy
- Laura McKnight, President and CEO, Greater Kansas City Community Foundation
- Grant Oliphant, CEO, Pittsburgh Foundation
- Ellen Remmer, President and CEO, The Philanthropic Initiative
- Paul Shoemaker, Executive Director, Social Venture Partners Seattle
- Sean Stannard-Stockton, CEO, Tactical Philanthropy Advisors
- Jane Wales, Founder, Global Philanthropy Forum; Vice President for Philanthropy and Society, Aspen Institute
- Tim Walter, CEO, Association of Small Foundations
- Lowell Weiss, President, Cascade Philanthropy Advisors
- Kim Wright-Violich, former President, Schwab Charitable

Note: The titles and affiliations for each leader are the ones they held when they participated in DEN. Not all of these leaders were involved in drafting or ratifying the Effective Donor Principles & Practices. To get a list of resources aligned with and useful for teaching these principles and practices, please contact Lowell Weiss at lweiss@cascadephilanthropy.org.

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