

Bloomberg Makes Largest Advocacy Grant Ever

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Kudos to New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Bloomberg Philanthropies for making a \$50 million grant to the Sierra Club for its work to advocate and organize against coal-fired power plants in the United States. The story broke in Thursday's *Washington Post*.

The grant from Bloomberg Philanthropies may well be the largest advocacy grant in the history of American philanthropy. This distinction previously belonged to Atlantic Philanthropies, which in 2008 invested more than \$25 million for organizing and advocacy in support of health reform. The grants went to the Health Care for America NOW! coalition and contributed significantly to the passage of historic legislation.

Far too often, American foundations are reluctant to invest heavily in advocacy, community organizing and civic engagement -- even though it's proven that these strategies provide a tremendous return on investment. Just a few years ago, only an estimated 7 percent of the more than 70,000 foundations in the country devoted more than a quarter of their grant dollars to these strategies.

Does the Bloomberg grant mean that attitudes of American grantmakers are changing? Are we going to see a flood of new foundations leveraging their limited dollars by investing in this kind of systemic change? I sure hope so.

Last month, more than 60 of our nation's grantmaking organizations made a public commitment to serve the common good in this way. [Philanthropy's Promise](#) is a voluntary effort to celebrate and encourage grantmaking that prioritizes and empowers underserved communities. Funders who signed on for the initiative are all investing heavily in advocacy and organizing. This three-minute video by the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, which is leading the initiative, explains the campaign:

Coal plants have a negative impact not only on the environment but also on low-income communities and communities of color. This grant by Bloomberg Philanthropies is truly exemplary and meets the spirit of Philanthropy's Promise by promoting systemic change that empowers and improves the health of underserved communities.