

What should philanthropy look like 45 years from now?

JARA DEAN-COFFEY

Director, *The Equitable Evaluation Initiative*,
Founder and Principal, *Luminare Group*

"I increasingly find myself going to the origins of words, ideas and actions to better understand what twists and turns may have happened along the way — shaping out present day understandings.



"For philanthropy I go to the Greek origins, where philanthropy means love of humanity and supposedly first showed up in Aeschylus *Prometheus Bound* around 2,500 years ago. That definition still rings true to me as an aspiration for what philanthropy should be. And yet I know that in that simple word — *humanity* — there are differing beliefs about who is human, what it means to live in community, the idea that our existence is dependent on a collective responsibility and an understanding of our interdependence with one another and with this land — of which we are caretakers. *Perhaps what is needed most of all is the desire for all to thrive.*

"Forty-five years from now I hope philanthropy (which will never be a monolith) moves away from being a safe haven for wealth and moral logo for high-net-worth individuals and that instead it intentionally organizes in a way that reflects and invests in the best of us; that hearts, minds and efforts are dedicated to our shared liberation, justice and equity and that it holds *love of humanity* as its core *raison d'être*."

DAVID CALLAHAN

Founder and Editor, *Inside Philanthropy*, Author of
"The Givers: Wealth, Power, and Philanthropy in a New Gilded Age"

"Hopefully, the next 4 decades will see far-reaching economic reforms that reduce today's grotesque concentration of wealth in the hands of America's richest households. If that happens, philanthropy will be less dominated by billionaire mega-givers than it is today, which would be a very good thing.



"Of course, though, change at that level may not happen and I suspect that 45 years from now the richest Americans will be even richer and that the flow of money into philanthropy will be even greater. At the same time, I expect that the resources of government at all levels will be much diminished as discretionary spending is relentlessly squeezed by the costs of entitlement programs like Medicare, public pensions and interest payments on debt. In other words, we face a future in which philanthropy — and billionaire donors in particular — are likely to have even greater power to shape public life.

"To protect our democracy, philanthropy should be more tightly regulated than it is today, with stronger requirements for transparency and stricter limits on the ways that tax-deductible funds can be used to influence public policy and elections. But stronger rules won't be enough. We also need changed norms that encourage funders to truly share power with the communities that they serve and greatly increased giving by small donors that can offset the influence of the biggest givers."

VU LE

Writer, *NonprofitAF.com*

"Forty-five years from now, there is less philanthropy. Government is strong and representative after people woke up and realized that philanthropy cannot replace effective societal safety nets such as fair wages, universal health care and robust voting rights. Significant progress has been made on reparations to Black, Native and other marginalized communities for centuries of exploitation. Laws are in place so that rich people are paying their fair share of taxes and not hoarding their wealth through family foundations and donor-advised funds. Billionaires no longer exist, as that status is widely perceived by the general public to be unethical.

"With more effective government, and the rich paying their share of taxes, philanthropy has a smaller role to play but is still vital. It focuses on what's best for the community, not what tugs at the heart-strings of wealthy white donors.



This includes nurturing and supporting vital movements, leaders and advocacy efforts, especially those from communities most affected by systemic injustice. Foundation board trustees reflect the community and are no longer mostly rich white men. There are no more grant applications; instead, each organization or movement has one comprehensive information package that they use for all funders. Decisions are made quickly, usually within days. Grants are general operating and for multiple years.

“With a stronger, more equitable world and less need for philanthropy or nonprofits, many professionals leave the sector to pursue their dreams of selling artisanal sauerkraut or doing wedding photography.”

DR. CARMEN ROJAS

President and CEO, Marguerite Casey Foundation

“Philanthropy has a once-in-a-generation opportunity to make the necessary shift from being the power, to becoming the means by which communities become more powerful. Today’s calls for transparency, trust and commitments to racial justice, if heeded, will result in a wholly transformed field.



“My hope is that by then, we are known by grant recipients as partners as they take more creative, provocative and necessary actions in the fight against white supremacy and economic inequality. We will have practiced anticipating the types of actions that advocates will need to take in order to contest for power. They will have evidence that we can move beyond the symbolic calls for more diversity and lifting up 1 or 2 ‘rich white people whispers.’

“Instead, our grant recipients will know that in order to shift power, we are prioritizing lifting up whole communities of leaders with proven track records of fighting for racial justice, and that this commitment is reflected in our board rooms, leadership and across our organizations. Our endowments will not be invisible assets that allow for our grantmaking and instead will be understood to be part of the tools that shift power to those people who have long been excluded from it.

“In the future, with some practice, philanthropy committed to equity, justice and equality will shift from the well-worn practice of paying to play and will instead know what it means to fund to win.”

EDGAR VILLANUEVA

Senior Vice President of Programs and Advocacy, Schott Foundation for Public Education, Author, “Decolonizing Wealth: Indigenous Wisdom to Heal Divides and Restore Balance”

“In 45 years, philanthropy as an industry will no longer exist as we now know it. Tax reform has greatly reduced the way wealthy individuals and corporations store funds in donor-advised funds and private foundations, and these folks now pay their fair share of taxes, yielding an increase in public funds to support basic universal needs.



“Because America’s demographic is now majority people of color, we no longer need to announce the first person from ‘x-marginalized community’ is leading an organization or a foundation, and it is common to have more BIPOC than white people in the boardroom.

“By 2066, we are not having the same conversations about race, climate and economic justice, because we didn’t give up – we chose to heal. Foundations can no longer exist in perpetuity, annual payouts are greater than ever, people of color are making the decisions, and we see actual requirements that boards and staff must represent the communities that they serve. Foundations are redistributing their endowments to BIPOC-led funds who support their communities with self-determination – an equitable shift in wealth and power.

“Philanthropic resources to support advocacy and movement-building are more than adequate, resulting in strong, robust movement infrastructure that ensures that all people, especially BIPOC, can thrive, have regenerative economies and grow generational wealth. Philanthropy has led the way for supporting truth and reconciliation in the U.S. packaged with reparations and the returning of land. Closing the race wealth gap is within reach.”

AMORETTA MORRIS

President, Borealis Philanthropy

“Forty-five years from now, program officers and community leaders will be one and the same. Folks with lived experience will be at the center of visioning, resourcing and creating solutions. We will rightly define ‘expert’ knowledge and who holds it. The sector as we know it will not exist, because we will democratize



wealth and live in an economy anchored by collective care and deep democracy. As a queer, Black woman grantmaker from the South, and as president of the incredible team at Borealis Philanthropy, I understand this is a stretch from the present. But I believe that transformative change is possible when we trust, rather than try to control, communities.

“If we want to realize a radically different future – whether in 5, 45, or 100 years – we have to understand our role as funders in a radically different way right now: as liberated funders.

“Liberated funders are accountable to communities and assess their philanthropy by how well they are helping communities win freedom and self-determination.

“Liberated funders center people who are most impacted, and seek opportunities to redistribute power, learn from and with communities and act in service of movements.

“Liberated funders understand that the only way wide-scale social change has ever been won is by listening to community needs and solutions.

“Liberated funders know that in order to change the systems we’re a part of, we must also be willing to change ourselves. We must interrogate our own roles, as grantmakers and personally, in upholding white supremacy.

“Finally, liberated funders fund like they want communities to win.”

DIMPLE ABICHANDANI

Executive Director, General Service Foundation

“The next 45 years carry extraordinarily high stakes for our planet and our people. Today’s intersecting crises of racial, gender and economic injustice, democracy under attack by authoritarian forces and impending climate catastrophe loom large when we think about the future. The heart of these crises is all about power:



Who is heard? Whose interests are protected? Who is afforded agency over their lives and livelihoods. If philanthropy is to meet the challenges of our time and contribute toward a future where everyone can thrive, it will be because we invest in efforts to shift who has the power to shape our policies, our economy, our institutions and our stories.

“In 2017, U.S. foundation assets topped \$1 trillion. And yet, the philanthropic habit of spending only around 5% of our assets each year in short-term restricted grants is out of step with the urgency of our times. Some philanthropic leaders will tell you that their endowments are modest in size and even if fully deployed, are unlikely to make a dent in the problems of today. Others will tell you that our responsibility

is to think of future problems and needs and ensure that our assets keep growing to meet future problems.

“It may be true that the challenges we face are no match for any one institution’s resources, but taken as a whole, the philanthropic sector is a source of significant and untapped resources that can fuel the rapid changes we need to see. Future trustees who may live on a planet riddled with climate chaos are unlikely to look back and say, ‘I wish you had done less.’

“Perhaps the most hopeful vision for philanthropy 45 years from now is one in which the philanthropic sector is small and barely necessary. We could go all-in now to invest in creating a society in which our healthy, reflective democracy ensures that all people’s needs are met.” ■

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