



# PRINCIPLES & PRACTICES OF IMPACT-DRIVEN PHILANTHROPY

For donors seeking to create more impact in the world

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## About these principles and practices

These principles and practices are being developed, tested, and continually updated by the Impact-Driven Philanthropy Collaborative, a growing group of funders and practitioners who support donors in philanthropy (the most up-to-date version can be found [here](#)). The Collaborative, hosted by the Raikes Foundation, drew heavily from principles developed earlier by members of the Donor Effectiveness Network supported by the Hewlett Foundation.

There are many ways of creating positive change. This compilation is informed by many perspectives and shared with the understanding that different practices are valuable in different situations. We respect that different donors have varying amounts of resources that they can dedicate to giving; we offer these principles and practices as a reference when donors are leaning in.

While each person's journey is different, these principles and practices can guide us in maximizing the good we can do. We hope to inspire more donors to embrace the promise of impact-driven philanthropy, so that together we can create better outcomes and a brighter future—for our communities and our world.

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## How we define 'impact-driven philanthropy'

Impact-driven philanthropy is the practice of thoughtfully and intentionally using our time, talents and resources to give in ways that advance equity, effectiveness, and systems change. We believe it is important for us to

- be grounded in an understanding of the historical, racial, and social context of the issues we care about, the current power dynamics, and an understanding of who is least well-served (equity);
- be guided by community priorities, what is known about what works, and best practices (effectiveness); and
- focus more resources upstream on prevention, root causes, and reshaping systems (systems change).

## What principles and practices do impact-driven philanthropists share?

Through successes and missteps, we have learned that the following principles and practices help donors achieve more impact.

### 1. We maintain humility

- Regardless of our professional achievements, we challenge ourselves to approach philanthropy with openness, curiosity, and humility. We're eager to listen and learn from others, especially those who are closest to the challenges we're addressing.
- We respond to setbacks by believing that improvement through focused effort is possible, we come to

this work with a passion for learning and improving.

- We “go deep” on causes connected to our values. A heartfelt connection drives passion for improving—and often increases the meaning, purpose, and joy of giving.
- We focus our resources for impact. Focusing on a small set of issues, rather than taking a scattershot approach, gives us more opportunities to build meaningful relationships and knowledge in our chosen fields.
- We help others to learn by sharing openly about our own experiences, both successes and setbacks. We prioritize transparency in all that we do: we are open about our decision-making processes and clear about the intent of our giving.

## **2. We do our homework**

- We invest the resources and time to unpack the complex issues we care about and understand the social and historical context in which these issues exist.
- We believe that potential is evenly distributed but access to resources and opportunity are not. We understand that there continue to be structural or historical forces driving disparities affecting the people and communities we aim to serve.
- We identify the outstanding needs and current actors in the space, including full reasonable costs and who has the power to make decisions that will affect change (and who does not).
- We examine our own beliefs about how systems work and change happens, and try to understand all the resources we can contribute beyond money—including our professional skills, networks, and influence.
- We articulate how we believe change happens, and use that to develop goals and strategies based not only on the best evidence available but also the lived experience of those we hope to serve.
- We develop our strategies and goals before selecting the best giving vehicle(s) to help achieve them.
- We develop good indicators to help us determine where we’re headed and course-correct as needed.

## **3. We work with others**

- We seek out people who have intimate knowledge of the problems we’re trying to solve and join with them to co-create solutions. We avoid top-down “solutions” informed by experts but not the communities we hope to serve.
- Whenever possible, we engage other funders and build a network of peers with similar goals. If we have limited time or ability to commit to our causes, we identify others who can leverage our resources for maximum impact, such as funding intermediaries or collaborative efforts.
- Whenever possible, we give flexible, multi-year grants—the types of support that organizations need to invest deeply in learning, innovation, and talent.
- We seek to unlock the leadership and capacity of the communities in which we work. We help our partners strengthen their organizations' performance and capacity, not just their programs.
- When we invest in causes we’re passionate about and stick with them for the long haul, our work can achieve lasting impact. We stick with leaders who get results for a time period consistent with expectations and the difficulty of achieving social change. We communicate openly and often, and exit relationships with care.

## **4. We assess and react to ground reality**

- We are guided by integrity and strive to deliver a public benefit to better the world.
- We want to understand what’s working and what’s not—and help our nonprofit partners do the same. We use every resource available to inform our work, from peers and consultants to online platforms and in-person learning opportunities.
- We use qualitative and quantitative means to understand the impact of our efforts—positive and negative, intentional and unintentional—on the people and communities we serve.

- We seek unbiased, regular feedback from all of our stakeholders—including intended beneficiaries, grantees, and other funders.