

# Women and Philanthropy: Greater Influence and Responsibility

By **Linda C. Hartley**, HARTLEY CONSULTING, INC.



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A growing number of women are engaged in philanthropy, as baby boomers age and women outlive men by an average of seven years. A wealth transfer of at least \$41 trillion will take place in the United States by the year 2052, according to Paul Schervish, sociologist and director of the Boston College Social Welfare Research Institute.

How much of this wealth will be controlled or managed by women? Some estimates reach as high as 70%. What are the implications of women's growing influence in the non-profit sector?

## Charitable Giving

Schervish found that what matters most in predicting charitable giving is not gender, race, age, or income, but an individual's "associational capital, their networks and felt connections and the persuasive invitations they receive to give to institutions to which they feel connected."

"What motivates the wealthy is very much what motivates someone at any point along the economic spectrum...from heartfelt empathy to self-promotion, from religious obligation to business networking, from passion to prestige, from political philosophy to tax incentives." Philanthropy is "not the absence of self...but the presence of self-identification with others."

Mary Ellen S. Capek agrees that both men and women want meaningful engagement with causes they support. She cites a study conducted by The University of California which found that commonly assumed attributes of women philanthropists—"personal involvement, wanting to make a difference, recognition, wanting to see the results of giving, feeling responsible for giving—are as true of many men as they are of many women."

## Serious Business

Non-profits must take women as seriously as men. This is no surprise to successful fundraisers. Naomi Levine, who raised \$2 billion for New York University over two decades, says that the gender shift is affecting the giving dynamic at NYU. "Women must be recognized and incorporated into campaign strategies," she says. "Looking back, I should have paid more attention to the women, and encouraged the board to recruit more women as trustees."

Susan Weber Soros, founder for the Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, is a philanthropist and a fundraiser. She believes that "if you do something people care about, the funding will follow. Trust in an organization, for men and women, must be built over time."

## What difference can women make?

Women can continue to promote social change rather than uphold the status quo. They can play a larger role in creating a just and equal society—in their communities, their country and around the world.

Economic inequality persists: 66% of poor adults are women; women earn 25% less than men do for the same work; and two-thirds of women who work do not have pensions. While a growing number of women run foundations, only 5.7% of foundation dollars support programs specifically serving women and girls.

Christine Grumm, former director of the Chicago Foundation for Women, says, "Men have always understood their economic power to bring about change—or maintain the status quo. Women have some real answers for problems facing our society, but there is not enough respect for their ideas. The reason is that we have not flexed our muscle enough in terms of money."

## Opportunity and Responsibility

The word "philanthropy" is derived from the Greek root *philanthropos*, which means "loving human beings." The first definition of philanthropy in Webster's dictionary is "goodwill to fellowmen." Women of this generation and the next have the opportunity—and responsibility—to create a more enlightened and inclusive philanthropy, and to recapture the spirit of *philanthropos*.



Women in Development  
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