

Strategies for Young Philanthropists to Support Progressive Social Change

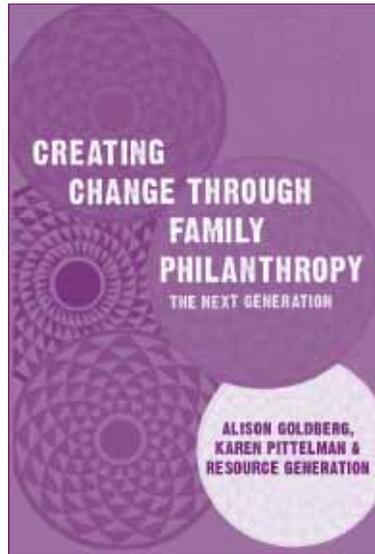
By Scott Benbow

While all eyes were on Warren Buffett last summer as he announced his \$43 billion gifts to the Gates Foundation and foundations led by his children, his was not the only enormous charitable transfer of 2006. Twenty-one Americans donated at least \$100 million each to charitable causes last year, nearly twice as many as the year before. With this unprecedented transfer of wealth, a new generation of philanthropists is confronting the difficult task of making grants in ways that are meaningful, accountable and effective. It is for this new generation of grantmakers that Alison Goldberg and Karen Pittelman have written *Creating Change Through Family Philanthropy: The Next Generation*.

Goldberg and Pittelman encourage young philanthropists to give in ways that achieve social change, which they define as creating a more just distribution of power and resources. To achieve social change, the authors urge families of means to explore their “money story”—the combination of luck, privileges, connections and historical forces that have resulted in their accumulated wealth. By acknowledging such factors, and recognizing the power and prestige that their wealth gives them, young people will be in a better position to give in ways that squarely address inequalities in our society.

Arguing that family philanthropy is not effectively serving the needs of low-income people, communities of color, women and girls, immigrants, refugees, and the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) communities, the authors challenge young philanthropists to examine the grantmaking practices of their family foundations. Who is sitting at the decision-making table, and how does this setup shape the decisions that are made? Are grantmaking decisions, even those with the best intentions, dictated primarily by family networks and connections, rather than community need? “As long as the real power over these resources rests only with those who are wealthy and white,” they ask, “how much has really changed?”

Creating Change is divided into two sections. The first provides a theoretical overview of family philanthropy and presents the authors’ arguments about making the sector more effective and accountable. The second, called “Taking Action,” provides a variety of tools for people to assess their



family foundations and quantify their own influence within the decision-making structure. It recommends methods for young philanthropists to begin uncomfortable, but helpful, conversations with their families about class privilege, racism, sexism, unequal distribution of wealth, grantmaking values, and social change. The authors urge family foundations to transform the grantmaking process in ways that makes it more respectful to the nonprofit organizations that depend on grants and the ultimate intended beneficiaries of those grants.

The authors include fascinating testimonials from young people who have tackled problems in their own family foundations. One young grantmaker, named Cameron, provides the most succinct justification for *Creating Change*. Because the field of family philanthropy is stagnant, he writes, “There needs to be an infusion of younger voices and conversations about what’s next in the evolution of family philanthropy.”

While most of their focus is on changing foundations from within, Goldberg and Pittelman are critical of the organizations that endeavor to shape philanthropy without the voices of important constituencies: the organizations and individuals who depend on foundation largesse. They illuminate the injustice of “funder-only” conferences, which are off-limits to grantseekers, and urge young philanthropists who attend such conferences to call attention to the shortsightedness and unfairness of refusing to invite such important stakeholders. They urge young philanthropists to remind funder-only conference participants that critical perspectives and experiences are absent, highlighting the profound difference between including activists into “funder-only” spaces versus speaking, or presuming to speak, on their behalf.

For philanthropists of any age, *Creating Change Through Family Philanthropy* offers helpful tools to deal with common problems. For young people learning how to operate as agents of change within less effective family foundations, Goldberg and Pittelman provide strategies for opening up the process and achieving social change.

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