

Introduction

What is philanthropy vs charity?

Philanthropy can seem like an unnecessarily long and fancy word. But behind all philanthropy are common values and sincere actions. At its core, it simply means a “love for human kind” and a commitment and desire to create a better society.

Philanthropy is often mentioned alongside charity. Charity is embedded in Asian traditions stretching back millennia. In its most prevalent form, charity is seen in acts of giving to temples, churches, mosques, clan associations or fellow neighbours.

But while charity may often be practised as a one-time donation or an immediate “band-aid solution”, philanthropy digs deeper. It includes addressing the root of the social problem through strategic and systemic means. It involves being curious enough to search for new solutions and approaches. It takes a long-term perspective to bring about change in society. Philanthropy is often just associated with disbursing money, but a philanthropist’s greatest strengths are the commitment to giving and the personal dedication of time, networks and expertise.

“Philanthropy is not about the money. It’s about using whatever resources you have at your fingertips and applying them to improving the world.”

— Melinda French Gates

Why is philanthropy important?

Philanthropy plays a crucial role in society as it is able to focus on overlooked issues. It can step in where government programmes have difficulty helping hard-to-reach groups because of geographic distance or social exclusion. It can draw attention to issues that economic markets otherwise would sideline, such as environmental pollution before it became a climate concern.

Philanthropy can act boldly and dynamically, unlike governments or businesses which are beholden to the demands of voters or shareholders. At its best, philanthropy can take risks and fund innovative research or experiment with new models. It can support advocacy efforts to increase public awareness or inform government policies. It can even shape society to be more equitable and create a better life for those in need.

At times, philanthropy can maintain the status quo. At its worst, philanthropy can cause harm, especially when it prioritises personal interests over community needs. This rarely occurs due to bad intentions but is instead often a by-product of ignorance. This guide gives you the guardrails and tools to avoid this.

Philanthropy can also be a deeply fulfilling and personal activity. Some philanthropists are motivated to give because of their faith or a spiritual desire to give back to others. Others use philanthropy as a means of passing on family values or to create a personal legacy.

Most of all, philanthropy should be deeply meaningful to both you and the society you wish to help. Without that connection, the dedication required to create and sustain long-term solutions may be difficult. As philanthropy researcher Peter Frumkin frames the relationship, philanthropy's greatest potential lies at the intersection of public needs and private values.

“Think of giving not only as a duty but as a privilege.” ■

— *John Rockefeller*

What makes philanthropy in Asia different?

Giving in Asia has an extremely long tradition, but the institutionalisation of that giving as philanthropy is a more recent and still emerging trend. Asia's rapid economic growth, alongside the popular belief that the global centre is shifting towards Asia, promises a growing importance of Asian philanthropy to come. At the same time, the current needs of Asia in present-day — and the need to build resilience against looming crises — highlights the critical need for philanthropy in Asia today.

Philanthropy in Asia differs from the way it is practiced in the West — that distinction is not positive or negative, but rather a result of the local context and environment.

Governments in Asia view the role of civil society differently from the West. In fact, the term “civil society” is rarely used in Asia. This is because the non-profits, foundations and intermediaries that comprise the social sector have a shorter history and are less established. It is also because the sector often is expected to act in alignment with government rather than to serve as an independent check on government.

The nascence of the local non-profit sector makes the interactions between philanthropists and non-profits quite different from the traditional grantmaker–grantee relationship in the West. Many Asian philanthropists operate their own programmes to maintain control and oversight over their philanthropic activities. Other Asian philanthropists choose to work close to the ground and actively engage with the organisations and initiatives that they support.

How can this guide help?

At APC, we believe it is important to anchor local and regional perspectives and shift away from the inclination for Western organisations to lead. We also acknowledge the value of learning from external models and sometimes importing them with the necessary adaptation. This guide incorporates both of these perspectives.

Even though Asia's philanthropy landscape is less developed, there are many noteworthy successes. Asia is home to many cost-effective solutions, born from the need to do a lot with very little. Innovations can also borrow ideas and leapfrog existing practices in the West. In this way, there can be learnings from Asia that can also be shared and replicated in other parts of Asia or the rest of the world.

With all of this in mind, let's start on this journey to explore philanthropy together. We look forward to sharing APC's approach to philanthropy and presenting case studies and examples to offer a more nuanced perspective of philanthropy in Asia in the pages that follow. May they inspire more reflection, conversations and impact ahead!

Tips from the Field

Before we begin, here is some introductory information for a budding philanthropist eager to begin their giving journey.

When you start off, it can feel like there are so many decisions to make:

- What issue do you focus on?
- Whom do you give to?
- How much do you give?

Just thinking about these questions can sometimes feel overwhelming. Before diving into the details in the following sections of the guide, here we present 10 tips to keep in mind when starting out.

1. Philanthropy is diverse

There is no one way to practise philanthropy. Each person has his or her own perspective, interest areas or preferences. What is important is to explore and define your own personal philanthropy style. Your philanthropy style is the way that you practise your philanthropy. For example, this could be engaged, hands-on giving for tried-and-tested programmes or support for new, experimental ideas. As you give, you will soon realise which approaches most resonate with you.

2. Just try

Avoid the quest for a grand blueprint before you start. The best way to learn what works for you is through practice. In the beginning, you may not know exactly what you want your philanthropy to look like. By treating your first grants as a way to learn, you can better understand your giving motivations and goals.

3. Keep an open mind

As a new philanthropist, you may come across feedback and fresh perspectives that challenge your initial assumptions. The first grants may not produce the results that you expect. Do not be discouraged — the realm of philanthropy intentionally targets the complex problems that society struggles to address. You can also change your mind and pivot your strategy along the way, as you become better at identifying what motivates you and what your ultimate philanthropic goals may be.

4. Be balanced

You do not want your giving at the start to be too big or too small, too risky or too safe. You should also avoid spreading yourself too thin. In the beginning, it is generally better to

give fewer grants in larger values. This is not just because of the dollar amount. As you explore, you will want to interact with the organisations that interest you to understand their strategies and programmes. Building these relationships takes time, but it is an essential part of the process.

5. Find a focus

Deciding what to focus on is arguably the most important — and most difficult — decision to make. By narrowing the scope of your philanthropy, you are creating the first version of your philanthropy strategy. You can start by identifying an issue, geography or group of people to first focus on. Keep in mind that these are not permanent decisions and these decisions can change over time.

6. Figure out how you will give

If you are just beginning with your philanthropy, establishing your own private foundation may not be the ideal first step. Just to establish a foundation requires substantial financial investment and time dedication. There will also be legal, logistical and administrative details to settle in addition to the up-front costs. It might be more practical and efficient to first focus on developing your own giving approach and style.

7. Know whom to engage and when

Rarely does any philanthropy journey start or continue entirely alone. For many philanthropists, engaging family members is a driving objective and benefit of philanthropy. There are many different roles that family members can play. Spouses, siblings and other family members could be co-philanthropists and jointly make decisions with you for your giving. They could also serve as advisors or assist with managing operations.

8. Find your giving style

Your style is how you can define your own way of practising philanthropy. Two philanthropists can focus on the exact same issue and employ considerably different styles for their philanthropy. Your values, experiences and acumen outside of philanthropy may shape your giving style.

9. Start with an eye towards evaluation

One of the hottest topics in philanthropy is monitoring and evaluation (M&E) — in fact, there is an entire section of this book dedicated to this. While it might feel too early to think about M&E when you are just starting out, the principles of reflecting on your giving outcomes and learning from your giving experiences are relevant no matter what.

10. Consider all forms of collaboration

It might seem daunting to join other, more experienced philanthropists. But this is the best way to leapfrog and leverage the knowledge of others. Collaborating also does not always mean committing funds to the same project. It could mean sharing information or aligning activities.

These 10 tips are intended help you as you begin your giving journey, but nothing can replace learning through experience. As you continue to explore and experiment with your giving, some questions that you might consider include:

Reflecting on grants

Which grant gave you the most satisfaction and why? Did you like a specific organisation? Was it because of the experience of working with the organisation? Was it because of their ability to demonstrate the impact of your giving?

Reflecting on your engagement

How much time were you able to commit to philanthropy? Do you prefer being on the ground and interacting with beneficiaries, or would you rather receive reports and updates for your giving?

Reflecting on future giving

What areas of philanthropy excite you for future giving? What additional support do you want for future philanthropy efforts?

Your reflections on these questions, along with the information in the rest of this guide, will equip you well as you enter the next stages of your philanthropic giving.