GIVING AS A COUPLE

ROCKEFELLER PHILANTHROPY ADVISORS
PHILANTHROPY ROADMAP

The Rolling Stones were wrong. You can get satisfaction. And many donors say you can get it by giving as a couple.

Giving together not only allows partners the chance to work on issues they care deeply about, it also provides an opportunity for their relationship to grow. Some couples say their joint philanthropy is one of the most meaningful shared experiences in their lives.

In addition, couples who give together can increase their effectiveness by combining their financial assets and dividing their philanthropic responsibilities. They can extend the range of their giving program by capitalizing on each partner's individual perspective and talents even as they unite around the shared values that inspire their work.

Of course, there are pitfalls. Some point to the challenge of working directly with a spouse or partner—saying old habits of miscommunication and existing power imbalances can hamstring attempts to be effective in philanthropy.

Yet couples who have created a strong record of joint giving over many years say there's no need to worry—the first step in giving as a couple is often just to relax. Because there is no mistake-proof approach, couples should feel fine about following their intuition to make initial gifts and adjusting their giving strategy as they go.

Giving as a couple can evolve just like any aspect of a long-term relationship. For that reason, "learning by doing" is a motto many philanthropic couples adopt successfully.

This brief guide is for emerging and experienced philanthropists. Part of the "Philanthropy Roadmap" series, it sets out key considerations for donors who give as a couple. It also poses questions to help donors examine how they might approach this particular form of partnership—and adventure:

MOTIVATION AND VALUES
Why are we choosing to give together?

POWER AND CONTROL
How will decisions be made?

TIME AND ENERGY
How will the philanthropic work be divided?

MONEY
How much should be set aside for philanthropy?

INDIVIDUAL GIVING STYLES
How will different sensibilities be balanced?

FAMILY AND LEGACY
How will the couple involve or not involve children, step-children and their spouses? How will the philanthropy evolve into the future?

See our checklist for Giving as a Couple at the back of this guide.

A WEDDING AS PHILANTHROPY

When the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge married in 2011, they joined a trend that is already well-established in the United States—namely, beginning married life with an act of philanthropy.

In place of wedding gifts, they asked for donations to the Prince William and Catherine Middleton Charitable Gift Fund. The fund benefitted 26 nonprofits—all causes that are "close to their hearts and reflect the experiences, passions and values of their lives so far," according to the fund's website. Not surprisingly, the fund was a massive success. Buckingham Palace says about $1.7 million dollars were raised.

The couple's first public engagement after the wedding also benefitted a charity, the U.K.'s Absolute Return for Kids (ARK). The Prince used the occasion to announce that his wife would be joining the foundation he has with his brother, Prince Harry, and that together, they "hope to use our philanthropy as a long-term catalyst for meaningful change."

What does that mean? Well, in the following passage from a prayer they recited at their wedding at Westminster Abbey, there is an indication that their philanthropy as a couple will be oriented by compassion and service.

"… In the busy-ness of each day keep our eyes fixed on what is real and important in life and help us to be generous with our time and love and energy. Strengthened by our union, help us to serve and comfort those who suffer …"

Prince William and Catherine are no longer accepting donations to their wedding fund. But the idea still holds a beguiling attraction—even for those of us without royal blood. Why not start off a committed relationship as you mean to continue—by giving.

> "Both of us were fortunate to grow up with parents who taught us some tremendously important values. Work hard. Show respect. Have a sense of humor. And if life happens to bless you with talent or treasure, you have a responsibility to use those gifts as well and as wisely as you possibly can. Now we hope to pass this example on to our own children. We feel very lucky to have the chance to work together in giving back the resources we are stewards of."

BILL AND MELINDA GATES

GETTING STARTED

Giving as a couple offers great opportunities to explore— on both philanthropic and personal levels. Partners and spouses can investigate different ways to address important problems and do good, and, in the process, they can learn new things about each other. The first step for many donor couples is simply to sit down and have a discussion—exploratory, naturally—about the values and motivations that inspire them to give together.

In this sense, getting started is straightforward. It requires only time and patience to listen and talk. And numerous donors report their discussion and the ensuing philanthropy have brought them closer as a couple.

On the other hand, of course, this isn't true for all donors. Long-term relationships tend to have long-term relationship dynamics. And these tend to flow into philanthropy. Still, couples who explore philanthropy together can find new focus for an existing relationship and the chance for fresh understanding.

MOTIVATIONS AND VALUES

WHY ARE WE CHOOSING TO GIVE TOGETHER?

In philanthropy, the range of values and motivations can seem as extensive as human experience itself. Donors cite everything from religious commitments to feeling a responsibility to "give back" to tax considerations ("I would rather give it away than give it to Uncle Sam"). Two guides in this series ("Your Philanthropy Roadmap" overview guide and "Knowing Your Motivation") go into more detail on how donors can achieve clarity in this area. But for this guide, it is enough to know that the "why" of giving can help guide key decisions such as determining funding interests and goals, the level of giving and whether the couple wants their philanthropy to be public, anonymous or somewhere in between.

Trusted family advisors and professional philanthropic advisors can help couples here. But the most important work is up to the couple. Here are questions which can be used to begin the discussion.

Have either of us found fulfillment in giving; if so, where is it greatest for each of us?

What life experiences — or epiphanies — have inspired us, individually, to give?

What motivations and values do we share — what is our common ground for giving?

Where and how do we think differently?

Has anything has held us back from giving in certain ways or to certain areas? If so, what are those limitations and can they be addressed?

Is legacy important to us? What shape should it take? How would we like to be remembered?

MIKE SCHAEFER AND RIC WEILAND

THE DEATH OF A PARTNER AND THE IMPORTANCE OF A GIVING PLAN

Philanthropy was more than just a shared interest for Mike Schaefer and Ric Weiland, it was "a core value that brought us together," according to Mike. And when Ric died unexpectedly in 2006 at the age of 53, philanthropy remained something that united them.

Individually, both had committed to give the majority of their wealth away long before they had met, and long before their investment portfolio began showing dramatic gains in the early 1990s. Ric had garnered his wealth as one of the early employees of Microsoft. During his life, Ric donated at least $30 million to carefully researched organizations. When he died, another $180 million dollars was allotted to 20 of these organizations, according to the directions of his estate plan.

Mike sums up their reasoning this way: "Why wait until you're old and senile — or dead — to give to the causes you believe in? It made sense

to have a thoughtful giving plan and spend our time helping to build the capacity of our beneficiaries so that they would be ready to astutely handle a more significant investment in their work whenever the time came."

More than half of Ric's estate, $110 million, went as unrestricted gifts directly to low-risk, well-established institutions including Stanford University, the United Way, Children's Hospital, and the Nature Conservancy.

Another $65 million is being distributed over eight years through a donor advised fund at the Pride Foundation to smaller, higher risk organizations, including ten national LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) nonprofits that represent a broad cross section of the gay rights movement. "We knew these would be unprecedented bequests and likely a challenging amount of money for many of these organizations. The good news is that Ric was a long-time supporter of these causes and had focused on building their capacity for almost two decades."

Mike says he, as the surviving spouse, is "doing just fine and dandy without the hassle of receiving any significant portion of my partner's estate. By agreeing in our estate plans to establish charitable remainder trusts for our loved ones, and give all our assets to specific charities at the death of the first spouse, we sure saved a lot of hassle — and I have been able to move on with my life."

He admits their approach was unusual, but he recommends it as a very rewarding giving style.

"Our goal was to build community wealth, not personal wealth. We felt the potential for a transformational return on our investment was much greater if we built a strong community than if we just grew our family investment portfolio … While our philanthropic plans were accelerated due to tragic, unexpected circumstances, my hope is our example will help others accelerate their giving."

> "Our goal was to build community wealth, not personal wealth."

POWER AND CONTROL

HOW WILL DECISIONS GET MADE?

Equality is part of U.S. law and culture. But when it comes to relationships and finance, inequality is common — particularly around the control of assets and other decision-making.

When couples form a giving strategy, they may want to consider setting out just how their philanthropy will be directed and who will do the directing. This may mean making some understandings explicit in philanthropy.

How will the couple decide on their philanthropic goals and approach? How will they decide on what organizations to support or which social impact businesses to invest in? How will philanthropic money be invested and how much will be dispersed? Will other family members be involved in the decision-making?

Facing these questions together might be difficult, but such an approach is often beneficial. A giving strategy that's truly appropriate for a philanthropic couple must reflect the process that suits them as well as the goals they want to achieve. And though each individual in a couple usually takes on some responsibilities independently, the overall approach to giving remains a team effort.

As in any partnership, engagement is driven by personal and emotional involvement. When spouses or partners share decision-making or discuss and agree on how to divide these responsibilities, their mutual engagement in philanthropy often deepens.

INHERITANCE AND FINDING A POWER BALANCE*

Cassandra, an Irish-American, and Craig, an African-American, described themselves as "just another bi-racial couple from Laramie, Wyoming." Both 40-something geologists, they worked in the oil business, earning similar paychecks. Then Cassandra inherited a significant sum from her father, who had run a successful hedge-fund. She felt inspired by the gift and wanted to start a charitable giving fund. Craig didn't agree. He thought they should invest the money and wait to do their major philanthropy later. It also bothered him that many people, he felt, now judged him because of the wealth of his wife. He didn't talk about it, but he felt threatened by the huge change in the financial balance of their relationship. Cassandra knew he was unhappy and so offered him two options:
1) she would give the money to another foundation to disperse and they could go back to the way things were; or,
2) they would each commit to a 50/50 split of responsibilities and powers in a new foundation they would create themselves. Craig opted for the second option and they sat down with a philanthropic advisor and their lawyer to develop their giving strategy and prepare the groundwork for the new foundation. Over time, they discovered that a 50/50 split in power made things difficult because it meant they often had to negotiate and compromise to move forward. But that difficulty also had a positive side. It deepened their partnership by regularly showing them that they could overcome obstacles as a couple and find unity in the face of initial disagreement.

*This composite story combines elements of real experience from a number of donors. Details have been changed to protect privacy.

TIME AND ENERGY

HOW WILL THE WORK BE DIVIDED?

Depending on family and business commitments as well as personal preferences, couples often differ in how much time they can or want to devote to their philanthropic activities.

Unless paid staff or advisors take care of operational duties, the way a couple delegates authority and divides work in their philanthropy can have a huge impact on how much enjoyment they get from their giving.

Seen from one perspective, splitting up tasks can be simple common sense. Responsibilities can be divided according to inclination and talent. There can even be some completely separate areas of interest, including individual gifts.

One enlightened approach is to develop two separate individual funds as well as a common pool of money. That way couples can give together where there is agreement — say, education — and give independently where they have separate philanthropic interests — say, art museums and conflict resolution.

In short, couples don't have to do everything in philanthropy together. Individual activity can even make the giving experience more vibrant as partners have a chance to report back and learn from each other.

However, a division of labor that is not mutually accepted can breed resentment around inequities of workload and lack of

shared decision-making and recognition. Some donors can even feel cheated. ("Hey, I'm doing all the work and you're getting all the glory.")

There is no single wrong or right answer here. But experienced philanthropic couples say that it's worthwhile to discuss the issues to find clarity around workload and roles and then to schedule regular reviews of this understanding to allow for the nearly inevitable changes in circumstances, finances and giving preferences.

THE HANDS-ON PHILANTHROPY OF LAURA AND JOHN ARNOLD

THINK BIG, TAKE RISKS AND GET INVOLVED

Laura and John Arnold never dreamed they would have the wealth to seek lasting change in the world. Still in their 30s, they describe a "middle-class" upbringing, attending public high school and working their way through college. But that was before John found extraordinary success with his hedge fund Centarus Energy, building a net worth in the billions through his natural gas investments.

Laura is an attorney and a former oil company executive. Together with John, she saw a great opportunity in their significant wealth — an opportunity to do good.

In 2008, they formed the Laura and John Arnold Foundation, dedicated to seeking transformational social change through innovation. In 2010, they joined the Giving Pledge (givingpledge.org), promising to "devote the majority of our wealth, time and resources to philanthropy in the coming years." Their goal: to maximize opportunity and minimize injustice. Their focus areas: criminal justice reform, education reform K–12 and public accountability (in particular, reform of public employee pension benefits).

Their foundation also works in knowledge management, developing interactive databases for major issue areas (beginning with education) so that all the research, policy, organizations, technology, and other data is all in one place and useable. When complete, these will be free to the public.

The Arnolds decided jointly on an entrepreneurial approach to addressing society's problems, incorporating leveraged giving, collaboration with other philanthropists and investments on a scale calculated to have a large impact. One example of this kind of giving came in 2011. They matched the $25 million gift of philanthropists Eli and Edythe Broad to Teach For America. The Robertson Foundation and Steve and Sue Mandel also gave matching gifts to reach a total of $100 million. The money went to create an endowment for the nonprofit, which recruits recent college graduates to teach in low-income schools. The gift was meant to be transformative — so the nonprofit could be seen not as a movement, but as a lasting institution, with an endowment like a university to fund its ongoing operations and growth.

Most striking, however, is the Arnolds' joint approach to managing their giving. The co-founders see themselves as part of the working "team" of their foundation — influencing "the organization's overall direction and daily execution."

They say it comes from a sense of responsibility: "We are deeply indebted to our community and our country for the many opportunities granted to us, and for a social and economic environment in which we could make the most of those opportunities. We consider it our responsibility to ensure the same opportunities for others."

Even though they are early in their careers as philanthropists, they have already made significant decisions about funding their philanthropy and setting a time horizon for their giving. On their website, they state: "Philanthropists should seek to create significant change within their own lifetimes and exhaust most or all their financial corpus in pursuit of their goals."

"We are among the converted having committed to give all our net worth to philanthropy starting with a grant of $1.3 billion in 2006 to our spend-down Foundation. When you think about it, no other approach seems to make sense. Passing down fortunes from generation to generation can do irreparable harm. In addition, there is no way to spend a fortune. How many residences, automobiles, airplanes and other luxury items can one acquire and use?"

HERB AND MARION SANDLER

Sandler Foundation created and continues to fund the American Asthma Foundation and the nonprofit newsroom ProPublica

MONEY

HOW MUCH SHOULD BE SET ASIDE FOR PHILANTHROPY?

Most couples don't consider philanthropy until they have achieved a considerable degree of financial independence. So they may believe they need not worry much about money as long as they are giving within their comfort zone.

If their giving is informal and based mostly on replying to requests for donations, they may not need to concern themselves.

However, couples who set out to be strategic in their giving—creating a foundation or a donor-advised fund and seeking to achieve certain social outcomes—are wise to consider money issues more carefully.

Deciding how much money should be used for philanthropy involves working out budgets not only for gifts but for other costs as well. These can include the setting up of a giving vehicle like a foundation and paying for professional advice.

Donors are also wise to remember that financial decisions about philanthropy are not made in a vacuum. Strategic giving is part of a larger discussion, including, among other things, inheritance for children, how to budget to take care of the family's needs, investment strategy, whose money it is and how the couple shares—or doesn't share—the control of that money. Differing views about any of these areas can have a major impact on giving. Couples often benefit from taking time to reach clarity about their overall financial picture before they begin their joint philanthropy in earnest.

MARC AND LYNNE BENIOFF

SALESFORCE.COM COUPLE NARROWS FOCUS FOR BIG IMPACT

In 2010, Marc and Lynne Benioff decided to radically change their approach to their personal philanthropy by rolling five years of giving into one donation.

The $100 million gift, to be paid over five years, will help fund a new children's hospital and research facility at the University of California at San Francisco (UCSF) where Lynne gave birth to their child in 2008.

The move represented a huge change of strategy for the couple. Previously, the billionaire chairman and CEO of Salesforce.com and his wife, who is a trustee on the UCSF foundation board, gave mostly anonymously. They spread their support among a wide variety of nonprofits, ranging from endowing chairs at a university to giving money to a monastery in Bhutan.

They decided on a new approach because they felt they had achieved mixed results and in the words of Mr. Benioff: "You should be able to make a gift and see that it was having some kind of impact."

The impact they sought with their high-profile gift is two-fold. First, they wanted to help create "the most advanced children's hospital in the world … supporting the translation of medical research into clinical practice." And second, they wanted to encourage other philanthropists to support the project.

The Benioffs say they will retain a single philanthropic focus on the hospital for an additional five years after the $100 million gift is completed in 2015. Then, "we'll reassess in 2020 where we are and look for the next target," said Mr. Benioff.

In the meantime, corporate philanthropy through the Salesforce.com Foundation will continue as normal, supporting nonprofits with technology innovation, volunteer time and annual grants.

INDIVIDUAL GIVING STYLES

HOW WILL DIFFERENT SENSIBILITIES BE BALANCED?

Partners sometimes see the world through different lenses. When donors give as a couple, these varying views can be complementary, adding perspective. They can help to refine what the couple wants to achieve and the way they want to achieve it.

Of course, sometimes partners see the same circumstances so differently that tension and conflict can result. Which organizations get grants? How much public recognition of a gift is appropriate? How should family members be involved in the philanthropy? These significant issues can turn into obstacles to progress unless differences in approach are accommodated.

Yet, even in such difficult situations, transparency and respectful discourse can be of great practical value. Treating differences openly can start a process which can turn a perceived problem into a tool for approaching philanthropy in a more nuanced way, including doing at least some giving separately.

Couples may want to consider the following points as they develop—or refine—a giving strategy with their loved one. The statistics come from a 2010 survey of 800 high-net-worth households. The survey was carried out by the Center on Philanthropy at the University of Indiana. (Please bear in mind these points are meant to encourage discussion of a couple's own particular understanding and approach and are not meant in any way to be prescriptive.)

The survey found less than half (41 percent) of wealthy donor couples conferred about their giving and then made joint decisions about their philanthropy.

A quarter of respondents said they conferred but then most of the time, one person made the decisions.

About 16 percent of the couples did not talk at all about their giving—one person making all decisions.

Other couples, 15 percent, made charitable giving decisions separately all the time.

These numbers demonstrate the variety of approaches couples adopt to deal with different giving styles. Other figures—such as the survey results on how couples decided what causes they would support—also suggest considerable independence.

About half of high-net-worth couples surveyed (51 percent) gave to causes both partners supported, whereas 35 percent gave to causes that just one partner—the philanthropic decision-maker—thought was important. About 12 percent of gifts went to causes important only to the partner of the decision-maker.

WHAT HAPPENS TO A COUPLE'S PHILANTHROPY AFTER A SPLIT *

Doug and Molly worked together to create a very successful business building homes across the Midwest. In 2008, they sold the business and formed a family foundation dedicated to supporting sweat-equity organizations like Habitat for Humanity. Two years later, in spite of — or perhaps because of — their increased time together, Doug and Molly's relationship disintegrated. He moved out. There was a new girlfriend. Then, finally, a divorce was granted. Doug assumed that Molly would continue to support the foundation, but instead she wanted to break it in two. He was incensed. He had earned the money, he reasoned. She had supported the foundation and its goals. Now, he felt she was doing this to spite him. On the contrary, she said, she just didn't want to have that shared responsibility any more. Besides, her philanthropic goals had changed. She now wanted to support entrepreneurial businesswomen in the Midwest with small grants and training. The couple was at an impasse for an entire month. And then Molly offered a suggestion: why not ask their twins, who were both college-aged, if they would sit on both boards. This would introduce them to philanthropy, but also give some family cohesion at a difficult time. Doug felt splitting the foundation was still inefficient. But his consideration for his children made him re-think his position. When he called them each on the phone, he found that they were enthusiastic about the plan and positive about working with him on his nonprofit housing projects. That made all the difference. Doug agreed to the split and both foundations have made a successful transition.

* This composite story combines elements of real experience from a number of donors. Details have been changed to protect privacy.

FAMILY AND LEGACY

HOW WILL THE COUPLE INVOLVE — OR NOT INVOLVE — CHILDREN, STEPCHILDREN AND THEIR SPOUSES? HOW WILL THE PHILANTHROPY EVOLVE INTO THE FUTURE?

In this age of blended and nontraditional family units, just defining who participates in a couple's family philanthropy can be challenging. Who should be at the philanthropic table? Children? Stepchildren? Spouses of children? Divorced spouses of children? The decisions will affect not just how a couple goes about its present giving, but how the couple's philanthropic legacy should be managed by future generations.

WHO SITS AT THE PHILANTHROPIC TABLE? *

One couple from Arizona, Samantha and Travis, decided they wanted to encourage an ongoing family legacy of giving. They worked hard to include their three adult children in key family foundation decisions and allowed them to allot some grants on their own. But when the children wanted to involve their spouses, Samantha stoutly rejected the idea. After a few months of wrangling, her children refused to sit on the family foundation's board. And Samantha and Travis were left as the only trustees of their family philanthropy.

* This composite story combines elements of real experience from a number of donors. Details have been changed to protect privacy.

Some couples choose to forego traditional philanthropic legacy. Instead, they set an end-date on their giving. Bill and Melinda Gates are perhaps the most prominent examples. They, together with trustee Warren Buffett, have pledged to spend all the resources of their $36 billion foundation within 50 years after Bill and Melinda's deaths. They say they are determined to do as much as possible, as soon as possible, to achieve progress in the areas where they work.

Yet, there are other couples who are drawn to philanthropy in perpetuity for personal reasons. Some also feel that continuing foundations build on past lessons learned and develop institutional capacity and knowledge that can inform future giving.

(Couples may want to consult our guides, "Talking with Your Family About Philanthropy" and "Legacy" for more detail.)

Whether couples want to create a family legacy or just want to involve their children, one idea worth considering is also a simple one: Ask family members how they might like to be involved. Donors who seek meaningful engagement of adult children while dictating terms can find themselves in complete control, but philanthropically disengaged from their offspring.

PIERRE AND PAM OMIDYAR

EBAY FORTUNE FUNDS HYBRID PHILANTHROPY

Pierre and Pam Omidyar stand out for their strategic, hybrid approach to giving as a couple, but their style has undergone a huge evolution since September 1998 when eBay went public. (Pierre was the founder of eBay and remains chairman of the board.)

"We had priced the initial public offering at $18 a share," Mr. Omidyar wrote in a 2011 article for the Harvard Business Review. "During the course of the day the stock rose to nearly $54 … On paper my stake was more than $1 billion. It was shocking and completely unexpected. Soon afterward I began having conversations with my fiancée, Pam—now my wife—about what we were going to do with all that wealth … Within a few months we'd created a nonprofit family foundation, which is what new philanthropists typically do. We took an informal approach … We gave money to this charity or that charity. It was a responsive thing—we would read about something in the newspaper and it'd be 'Let's give money.' After a couple of years we realized we needed to professionalize the foundation and become strategically driven. We recruited some executives to help us think about how to take lessons from eBay and apply them to philanthropy."

The Omidyar Network, a philanthropic hybrid which funds for-profit social enterprise projects as well as nonprofit organizations, was one result of this approach. It was co-founded by the Omidyars as what they call "a philanthropic investment firm." Through this unique giving vehicle, the Omidyars have committed $442 million since 2004—$239 million in nonprofit grants and $203 million in for-profit investments. More than $100 million has been committed in the area of microfinance.

In addition, Ms. Omidyar founded two nonprofits on her own—Hopelab, harnessing technology to help young people with chronic illness, and Humanity United, dedicated to building peace and advancing human freedom. After moving to Hawaii in 2006, the couple decided together to begin new philanthropic efforts in the Islands. They gave $50 million to the Hawaii Community Foundation and have started the Ulupono Initiative to support both nonprofit and for-profit efforts for Hawaiian sustainability. "We don't just write checks," they say, "we engage deeply with the organizations we support."

The couple says the eBay community taught them a valuable lesson: "people respond to opportunity in inspiring ways." This insight is a major influence on their giving strategy. "The organizations we've created and the time and energy we spend on various causes is rooted in our belief that people are inherently capable but frequently lack opportunity."

For the Omidyars, the key is how they define their work. "Philanthropy is a desire to improve the state of humanity and the world," Mr. Omidyar writes. "It requires thinking about the root causes of issues so that we can prevent tomorrow's suffering. And if we want to make sustainable change, we have to put all the tools at our disposal to their best possible use." And that means using the techniques of venture capitalists as well as the traditionally more risk-averse approaches of non-profit organizations.

For their philanthropy, it also means a determination to "give away the vast majority of our wealth in our lifetime," as they wrote in their Giving Pledge letter to Warren Buffet and Melinda and Bill Gates. "We have more money than our family will ever need. There's no need to hold onto it when it can be put to use today to help solve some of the world's most intractable problems."

"We don't just write checks, we engage deeply with the organizations we support.

"There's a point at which it doesn't make any difference to earn more money. We are much more interested in doing things in the community … We have never particularly liked the expression about 'giving until it hurts,' but rather suggest the better standard might be — 'Give until it feels great.' "

JOYCE AND BILL CUMMINGS

Billionaire philanthropists who have vowed to donate 90 percent of their wealth to charity

MOVING FORWARD

The way a couple's career begins in philanthropy — or reaches a new level — is often very personal.

It can be as simple as when one partner or spouse asks the other to have a cup of coffee or tea so they can have an open-ended chat, so they can discuss those things they each really care about. Once, that conversation starts, the journey of philanthropic exploration has begun.

Thoughtful, effective philanthropists have made their mark through the years by following their intuition and compassion while also being guided by observation and analysis.

Professional advice will help in this process. But even the most experienced of advisors is dependent on donors to supply the inspiration, focus and goals of giving.

That's where philanthropic couples have a great advantage. By working together, they bring not only a dual perspective, but a potentially balanced one.

In the end, a couple's best resource for creating or refining their philanthropy is usually themselves.

COUPLES CHECKLIST

SHARED MOTIVATION & VALUES

Couples who give together often start their philanthropy — or take it to the next level — by examining their motivations and values, looking for philanthropic common ground.

COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE

Thoughtful, effective donor couples usually communicate about how philanthropic decisions will be made, especially when those decisions concern the structure and strategy of their giving.

DIVIDE AND CONQUER

Finding clarity around how the work will be divided can be beneficial for couples who give; this can include providing for separate areas of interest and even individual gifts.

LOOK AT BIG FINANCIAL PICTURE

Decisions about how much money should be set aside for philanthropic projects can be a part of a larger financial discussion, including inheritance for children, how to budget to take care of the family's needs, investment strategy, whose money it is and how the couple shares — or doesn't share — the control of that money. New philanthropic endeavors can offer an opportunity to renew understanding of the big financial picture.

ACCOMMODATE DIFFERENT STYLES

Couples are not clones when it comes to giving style. Individual approaches can be accommodated. In fact, a 2010 survey found more than half of high-net-worth couples make at least some of their decisions about giving independently of their partners.

TALK ABOUT THE FUTURE

Legacy issues and decisions about how long a couple's philanthropy should last influence a couple's entire giving strategy. Consider open discussions about these big questions and, if appropriate, ask family members how they might like to be involved.

LISTEN, GIVE, GROW

Two perspectives on philanthropy are often better than one. Honor your intuition, your compassion, your observations and your analysis. But consider listening to your partner's insights as well. A cup of coffee and a chat about "changing the world" could be the beginning of something beautiful—as well as meaningful—in your relationship.

ROCKEFELLER PHILANTHROPY ADVISORS is a nonprofit organization that currently advises on and manages more than $200 million in annual giving. Headquartered in New York City, with offices in Chicago, Los Angeles and San Francisco, it traces its antecedents to John D. Rockefeller Sr., who in 1891 began to professionally manage his philanthropy "as if it were a business." With thoughtful and effective philanthropy as its one and only mission, Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors has grown into one of the world's largest philanthropic service organizations, having overseen more than $3 billion to date in grantmaking across the globe.

Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors provides research and counsel on charitable giving, develops philanthropic programs and offers complete program, administrative and management services for foundations and trusts. It also operates a Charitable Giving Fund, through which clients can make gifts outside the United States, participate in funding consortia and operate nonprofit initiatives.

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