

Report on : Women's Philanthropy in the United States: Trends and Developments

Elsa M. Davidson, Ph.D. candidate in Anthropology, GC, CUNY

Introduction

We are living in a time of profound social and economic change. As global economic restructuring and the retrenchment of the welfare state have become the norm, people in the United States and throughout the world have needed to find alternative solutions to the pressing social problems confronting communities everywhere. Philanthropy and nonprofit organizations--often referred to as the third sector--have increasingly helped fill the substantial gaps left by a lack of social welfare provisions and the global prevalence of a stricter adherence to the dictates of a deregulated global free market. Poor women everywhere are disproportionately affected by these changes. The profound shifts in the global economy have meant that the poor in the United States and abroad are often left without economic recourse. Along with the movement of both capital and communities affected by economic shifts, the philanthropic sector is also changing, and those changes are especially evident in terms of women's participation as philanthropic donors, activists, fund raisers and nonprofit leaders.

Traditionally, women's philanthropic activity and social status was tied to a husband's wealth. Moreover, there is a long history of wealthy philanthropists donating to causes like universities and art museums which, as Teresa Odendahl and others have pointed out, generally serve to reproduce the class interests of the wealthy. Odendahl has written of the limitations wealthy women have faced, unable to jeopardize their somewhat tenuous positions as economically dependent wives.

But such a representation of "traditional" philanthropy is by no means a complete picture. Kathleen D. McCarthy has documented the pivotal role played by women philanthropists throughout the history of the United States. She points out that long before they had the right to vote, women were involved in a variety of reform movements--from moral reform to abolitionism to suffrage--designed to effect fundamental changes in American society and American government. In addition, American women of all racial and ethnic backgrounds have long been engaged in issues of public interest, and in particular have done socially minded work at the grassroots level to ensure community survival and success. Arlene Kaplan Daniels (1988) similarly deconstructs stereotypes of wealthy women.

Daniels' sociological study of women's philanthropic work in a northwestern city indicates, for example, that wealthy women often used their power and influence to build civic connections benefitting a variety of causes. Charitable efforts by wealthy women on the local level continue today, as exemplified by women in Bedford, New York, who have become involved in assisting female inmates maintain contact with their children, while raising money for a mother-child program at the local Correctional Facility (Ames 1998).

Today, the very definition of women's philanthropy is rapidly changing in response to global and domestic circumstances. As the Women's International Network News (Spring 1998) reported in their recent assessment of the implementation of the Beijing Women's Platform, women well know that the restructuring of third world economies has often further weakened the political will to address the problems of poor women and children worldwide. The need for attention to the poverty and human rights of women has generated a considerable response from both large foundations and smaller non-governmental organizations assisting women. The retrenchment of welfare in the United States has meant that philanthropic organizations have had to step up to the plate, assisting women cut from the welfare rolls in a number of ways. The technological boom, on the other hand, has created new pockets of wealth and those working in the field of women's philanthropy are beginning to take advantage of the new arenas of wealth, both as fundraisers and as business people becoming involved in women's philanthropy. The strategies, organizational styles, leadership issues, and current trends of the field of women's philanthropy are the subject of this background report. All of these factors provide an argument in support of women's philanthropy.

Susan Ostrander has also commented on a tendency to view women as a special interest group, and on a related belief that philanthropy focuses on specific groups instead of being "for everyone." At a time when there is an increasing trend in the United States towards women-centered philanthropic fundraising and giving, an interesting question arises concerning how women pursue their philanthropic goals: that is, what strategies are those working in the field pursuing in order to reach their goals? Much of the evidence which might answer this query is anecdotal in nature. Accounts of new trends in philanthropy, news about a particularly large donation, reports about the start-up of a nonprofit group aiming to train women nonprofit leaders or raise funds for a particular cause--these are typical of topics covered in the press. However, analysis of many similar articles from a wide variety of new sources, when considered

together with the nonprofit organizational literature, and academic research about women and philanthropy, reveals a number of specific trends and areas of interest.

Women's Philanthropy in the United States: Trends and Developments

Women's philanthropy is increasingly an activist field. Seminal groups in the field--including Resourceful Women of San Francisco, the Women's Philanthropy Institute, and Women and Philanthropy, to name but a few--are well aware that women now own over 50% of the investment wealth in the United States, and they are helping to devise and disseminate philanthropic strategies to take advantage of this fact.

Those in the field of women's philanthropy are concerned with:

- * effective methods to raise money for targeted causes;
- * the means to build lasting relationships with donors;
- * ways to expose potential donors to women's issues;
- * focusing funds on issues specifically pertaining to women and girls;
- * working for social change through philanthropic endeavors.

Furthermore, leaders in the philanthropic community are influencing public policy, lobbying for selected causes, testifying in Congress, and generally raising awareness about issues of concern to women from all ethnic, racial and demographic backgrounds in their capacities as chairpersons of women's funds, private philanthropies, and corporate philanthropic initiatives, and as nonprofit leaders and board members.

Teresa Heinz, Chairman of Heinz Family Philanthropies, provides a prime example of how the philanthropic community is influencing the public sector. Heinz testified before a House Ways and Means Committee earlier this year (March 1999) about the circumstances and needs of poor elderly women (the majority of elderly are female) in the United States. As Chair of the Heinz Family Foundation's Women's Institute for Secure Retirement, Heinz was able to offer members of government quantitative and qualitative information on the condition of the female elderly poor, and expert testimony as to how the public sector might emulate third sector efforts and meet the needs of the poor and female elderly.

Fundraising Strategies in Women's Philanthropy

Fundraising strategies are of principal concern when attempting to outline current trends in women's philanthropy. First of all, who does fundraising?

Joseph Mixer explains in an article in *Women and Power in the Nonprofit Sector* (1994) that women now outnumber men in fundraising associations, which he views as an indication that "the glass ceiling is cracking" for women in the nonprofit sector who wish to work in the areas of fundraising and development.

At the time of Mixer's article, when "feminization" of the sector was occurring, 52.2 % of nonprofit workers were female, and women held thirty per cent of top nonprofit positions available. Mixer points out that despite those figures, two thirds of the top development (fundraising) positions in nonprofit institutions are held by men. While fundraising became a "hot" career in the 1980s, it is only since the mid 1990s that prominent nonprofit firms have been selecting women to direct capital campaigns. African-American women have a particularly hard time obtaining positions as fundraisers outside of certain kinds of advocacy agencies and educational institutions, and Latina and Asian-American women are also underrepresented, typically working as fund raisers in youth organizations.

Racialism in the funding community nevertheless is being dismantled by the efforts of a variety of groups, including:

The Women of Color Fundraising Institute—a new organization sponsored by the Boston Women's Fund and the Haymarket People's Fund. This training program offers a year-long curriculum to women from grassroots community organizations on how to solicit funds, write grants, understand basic economics and the culture of philanthropy, as well as how to plan fundraising events and budgets.

The Sister Fund—which maintains a funding commitment to grassroots women's organizations in New York City and nationally, and seeks to heighten public awareness around issues affecting women and girls.

As women gain in experience and status as fund-raisers within this patriarchal but feminized third sector, what has been their experience?

Mary Ellen Capek, who was asked by the Global Fund for Women, the Michigan Women's Foundation, Resourceful Women, Women and Philanthropy, and the Women's Funding Network to research the issues of giving and fundraising within women's philanthropic work, comments that it remains difficult for women's organizations to raise dollars for programs and organizations targeting women and girls, but she also documents successes in the field and makes strategy suggestions. Capek points out that since 1997, there has been a growth in Women's Funds.

Teresa Odendahl also applauds this phenomenon, pointing out that in contradistinction to dominant trends of feminization, racialism, and professionalization in the field of philanthropy at large, women's funds redress the lack of philanthropic dollars spent on girls and women. They furthermore help to put gender-specific issues on the map for larger foundations. Moreover, as Capek suggests, women's funds employ distinctly successful strategies of women's philanthropy, widening the pool of donors to include greater class and ethnic diversity, and building symmetrical, mutually beneficial relationships with donors from all backgrounds, efforts that distinguish them from more traditional funds.

The Boston Women's Fund recently used this strategy to set up a one million dollar endowment to support grassroots organizations that help women and girls. They solicited a few large donations and then sought smaller donations from individuals in a drive to match one of the larger donations.

While the notion of a "women's fundraising culture" or way of doing business is controversial, Capek and others working in the field suggest both a pragmatic approach and learning from the success stories, rather than offering generalized and rigid recipes when it comes to organizational strategizing. Moreover, regardless of the debate about whether there is such a thing as a female institutional culture making women's philanthropic endeavors more successful, the success of women's funds demonstrates the efficacy of a "gendered lens" where philanthropic fundraising is concerned.

If one shies away from the concept of funding women's issues, then women donors will simply be covering the same ground as other philanthropic endeavors, tapping an expanded donor base for the generalized causes, which often do not benefit women. Finally, those working in the field of women's philanthropy and the women-focused third sector have benefited by soliciting funds from nontraditional sources from the newly rich gathered in places like Silicon Valley to successful minority communities such as those Latino communities found in South Florida. Thus, the trend is to take advantage of socioeconomic phenomena such as the new wealth generated with the technology and information industries.

Organizational Styles in Women's Philanthropy

Organizational styles vary in nonprofit and philanthropic organizations addressing issues focusing on women. The trend toward a more

heterogeneous donor pool has already been mentioned. There is a debate about women's organizational culture.

Collectivist-style democratic decisionmaking has often been perceived to be female gendered, but in her research on women's nonprofit sector organizations in New York City, Rebecca Bordt (1997) found that women typically employ a hybrid combination of "traditional" bureaucratic, hierarchical decisionmaking with a collectivist-oriented democratic approach. Bordt's historical work on the issue suggests that in the 1980s there was a backlash to second-wave feminist collectivist models of organization. Hence, in women's organizations, philanthropic institutional culture is above all pragmatic, making use of decisionmaking styles that best fit a given scenario. Team building is another aspect of organizational style and strategy in women's philanthropy.

The number of web sites and newsletters which specifically aim to share information about fundraising, donors, grantees and interesting and successful projects and programs assisting women and girls is testimony to the fact that women understand that networking and sharing resources ultimately serves to help the causes they wish to promote. Capek suggests that networking, coalition-building and sharing resources (including donor lists) is a highly effective way to augment philanthropic dollars. She cites EMILY's List as an important fundraising model.

While the media is flooded with stories about women assuming leadership roles in the nonprofit and philanthropic sector, women still suffer disproportionately low status as third-sector leaders. Ronald Shaiko (1996) emphasizes that while in fact 75% of the third sector's labor force is female, women occupy just 20% of board memberships and nonprofit directorship positions; similarly they hold 20% of the seats on foundation boards in the United States. Focusing on women's leadership roles within public interest organizations, Shaiko found that in public interest organizations, women hold one-quarter of executive directorships, and opportunities for advancement can be hindered by a lack of government-sector experience. In a study of women on the boards of nonprofit organizations, Bradshaw and Wolpin (1996) found that the higher the proportion of women on the board, the more likely the board is running a lower-prestige organization. Women, the authors found, are more likely to be found on power-sharing boards rather than CEO-run boards. The authors argue that for women, power on a board lies in numbers, not on the mere fact of a female executive director.

The women's philanthropic community has made substantial efforts to create new female leaders in the field, and to empower women donors to fund women-centered causes.

A case in point, beyond the fundraising institute just mentioned, is the Women's Philanthropy Institute (WPI). WPI is an organization that aims to help women gain confidence as donors. WPI has a speakers series and a newsletter which highlight the activities of women leaders in the field of philanthropy.

Women and Philanthropy, as well as the Virginia Institute of Leadership at Mary Baldwin College in Virginia, offer additional examples of the growing trend of training and development in philanthropic leadership in the United States. Moreover, women doing philanthropic work on specific causes of importance to them are often motivated to become leaders (see examples under update on "Corporate Entrepreneurial Initiatives").

Corporate and Entrepreneurial Initiatives in Women's Philanthropy

As the private sector has become increasingly active as a player in the arenas of domestic and international social and political action, it has helped make women's philanthropy a capital-driven manifestation of the women's movement. As a result, what can now be called a highly significant trend in women's philanthropy has emerged: women's corporate and entrepreneurial philanthropy.

As Annetta Miller and Seema Nayyar point out in their article on women entrepreneurs and philanthropy, women entrepreneurs are increasingly becoming philanthropists, whether on a large or small scale (*Working Woman*, July 1998). Nayyar and Miller mention that between 1992 and 1995, the number of women with a net worth of 600,000 dollars climbed by 28%, and the average charitable contributions by women increased 20% as opposed to six per cent for men. Women entrepreneurs are giving to and organizing for causes about which they care. A number of women in prominent positions at Fortune 500 Companies have begun to start their own companies or fund nontraditional women's initiatives.

Examples of corporate women's philanthropic initiatives include:

- * Catherine Muther's Three Guineas Fund;
- * Women Technology Cluster;
- * Barbara Lee's White House Project;
- * Hard-Hatted Women;
- * Next Generation Now.

In yet another example, entrepreneur Vera Bradley (whose net worth has reached \$9.2 million since the founding of her textile company in 1972) has set aside 1% of her revenue to support breast cancer patients. (Miller and Nayyar 1998)..

Furthermore, corporate philanthropy initiatives, run by both men and women, have taken up women's causes, often in the area of job training. For example, in March, 1999, Arthur Andersen employees in 36 of the firm's North American locations took part in a Dress for Success drive, assisting poor women in need of clothing for job interviews. While Andersen consulting is a corporation worth at least \$6 billion, similar ventures often occur on a smaller scale. For example, with little overhead, a woman in New York City recently started a fund for poor women in need of clothing appropriate for job interviews.

In the international arena of women's development, American women involved in the philanthropic field are very active, addressing issues as diverse as human rights, domestic violence, job training, and reproductive health care for women in impoverished areas throughout the developing world. American women affiliated with a number of large foundations, women's funds, and nonprofit entrepreneurial organizations fund and support women's micro-enterprise operations throughout the world. Susana Fried, Program Director of the Center for Women's Global Leadership in New Brunswick, New Jersey, argues that feminist models of economic development and community organizing have helped to propagate microenterprise assistance. Microfinance is favored among activists concerned with poor women's issues, as it is generally considered to be one of the most direct routes to empowering the disenfranchised. Women's World Banking held a conference (April 28-30, 1999) on microfinancing in collaboration with the U.N. Development Program in an effort to build regional microfinance networks in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. The Ford Foundation's newsletter on small overseas philanthropic initiatives, SEEDS, features international development initiatives assisting women and girls. Another valuable source of information on micro-enterprise assistance appeared in Whole Earth (Spring 1998).

Voluntarism in Women's Philanthropy

Beyond giving and raising money, another important aspect of women's philanthropy is voluntarism--the giving of time. But with more and more women gaining equality with men through their participation in the workforce, a social and cultural struggle still exists over the value of women's voluntary work.

Many women volunteers report feeling belittled for their important work. Such is the case, for example, with caregivers for the dying who work in a highly medicalized and still somewhat patriarchal environment (Auger and Day 1996).

One respected scholar of the third sector performed statistical analysis of women's voluntarism which revealed declines in white women volunteers overall and in the active role of African-American women as volunteers working for social change.

Applying logistic regression analysis to the study of women volunteers (Caputo 1997) has indicated that working women are less likely to volunteer, and that the higher the educational level a woman has, the more likely that she will attempt to change social conditions through her volunteer work.

Caputo's analysis revealed that while black women devote considerable time to changing social conditions through volunteer work, white women were less likely to be engaged as activists in their volunteer activities.

Furthermore, churches are less likely to provide an outlet for women's activist voluntarism than more "male" civic institutions and schools.

Nonetheless, a number of contemporary journals, including *Club Woman* and *Volunteer Leadership* (a publication of the Points of Light Foundation), feature American domestic and international voluntary initiatives, programs, and leaders, and often provide tips to nonprofit organizations which are dependent, at least in part, upon a voluntary workforce with its own interests and needs. Such accounts may help to lessen the stigma traditionally attached to women's volunteer work.

Women's Philanthropy in the United States: Trends and Developments

At a time when both an aging population is transferring substantial wealth to its children, and a generation of young wealthy entrepreneurs has appeared, issue-centered philanthropy has come increasingly to the fore. Many donors are also activists. An organization which embodies this trend toward activist and issue-centered philanthropy is Responsible Giving, a group of young business people who have made fortunes in the cyber industries and who reinvest money made from capital gains cuts in an effort to assist the poor and reimburse the Treasury Department (Lewis 1998 *Boston Globe*).

Women involved in issue-centered philanthropy truly represent a variety of causes. For example, women philanthropists and nonprofit leaders have started resource and funding organizations for breast cancer patients and patient advocacy groups like the Washington-based Society for Women's Health which performs "outcomes research" to ascertain that women are receiving adequate medical care across class, geographic, and ethnic boundaries. At the same time, women philanthropists continue to demonstrate concern about the effects on poor women of welfare, or of the transition from welfare to work.

Increasing appreciation of the indispensable utility of the third sector in a time of welfare retrenchment is evident in the variety of programs sponsored by different players in the sector. Examples include: community foundations, such as the Community Foundation of Greater New Haven which assists teenage girls in difficult economic circumstances; church shelters and third-sector organizations that provide housing for those of New Jersey's homeless who, because of new restrictions, are no longer eligible to receive welfare and shelter (New York Times Aug 18, 1998); foundation and nonprofit efforts to train low-income women as entrepreneurs, for example, the Women's Self Employment Project (Equal Means 1995) or Cooperative Home Care Associates (Kalima in Equal Means 1995).

Challenges for the Future of Women's Philanthropy

What are the challenges facing women's philanthropy? This question in part reflects the fact that women are increasingly at the forefront of a philanthropic field that is coming to be defined as "hands-on" and issue-focused.

Faced with a donor community more diverse than ever before, one challenge is to develop ever more effective and culturally sensitive ways to approach donors and maintain relationships with them.

The argument has been made by Capek that as donors become more and more "hands-on" in their approach to philanthropy, they should become involved in their causes.

Organizations such as the above mentioned Responsible Giving, Women and Philanthropy, and the Women's Philanthropy Institute clearly aim to empower women donors in new ways.

Observations by a number of scholars and practitioners about the importance of leadership and governing boards imply that women must

embrace the challenge of supporting leaders in the field, and assist one another to obtain positions of power in the funding community as well as on the boards of nonprofit organizations and on corporate philanthropic boards.

Those who work in the women's funding community and are already predisposed toward women-centered initiatives should continue to educate and infiltrate mainstream foundations which fund more traditional causes. In short, coalition building seems to be the key.

Do women attempting to involve larger, mainstream foundations as funders for their women-centered projects face a backlash against feminism? Capek and Ostrander disagree in their responses. Capek suggests developing a less feminist vocabulary and coming up with more market-savvy pitches to break down stereotypes of the feminist movement. Ostrander, co-chair of the National Board of Directors of the Women's Funding Network, on the other hand, does not believe that a backlash to feminism has hurt the women's philanthropy field. Rather, she feels that the main challenge is to continue to broaden the general understanding of "women's issues" so as to make the term more inclusive of women of color and working-class women.

The issues relating to women's funds, women's causes, and women's voluntary activities are currently undergoing definition and exploration. Givers and doers historically have had many different goals and constituencies. Yet, as Kathleen D. McCarthy points out, philanthropy has long provided women in the U.S. and elsewhere with the means to leave an imprint on legislation and institutions, and to shape the gray area between the family and the state. Today women are shaping the future direction of the political, social and economic arenas and, perhaps, the shape of philanthropy itself.