

Inside Philanthropy

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Can This Crew of Aspen Institute Big Shots Show the Way on Philanthropy?

By David Callahan

The legalization of pot is said to be bringing all manner of out-of-state visitors to Colorado, but it's hard to imagine the Aspen Institute getting much of a boost, since it draws the kind of "influencers" who have future confirmation hearings to worry about.

Anyway, Aspen has never had much difficulty rounding up high-level folks for its working groups, and the 2014 roster of the Aspen Philanthropy Group, which just met last week, is a case in point. It includes the chiefs of the following foundations: Carnegie, Gates, Goldman Sachs, Heron, Hewlett, Intel, Irvine, Kaufmann, MacArthur, MasterCard, Margaret Cargill Philanthropies, New Orleans Foundation, Packard, OSF, Rockefeller, and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund.

A few non-foundation folks are also in the mix, representing Bridgespan, the Foundation Center, FSG, and the Philanthropy Roundtable.

So: Who's missing from this group, which bills itself as "a small gathering of leaders in philanthropy and civil society who are at the cutting edge of social change?"

I guess the answer depends on how you define "cutting edge." But it seems that nearly any definition would encompass a range of players in philanthropy who aren't part of the Aspen group.

Here at IP, we write all the time about the good and interesting things that established foundations are doing. But when I think of the sweeping changes happening in philanthropy, my attention usually focuses elsewhere.

I think of the big new money coming on the scene, particularly from tech and finance winners, and just how differently some of these funders operate than the legacy foundations. Take, for example, a place like the Laura and John Arnold Foundation, which has moved \$261 million out the door since 2011 with only skeletal staff -- often in the form of multi-million dollar grants in service of disrupting ideas (like making college textbooks free.)

The new money is pretty mind-boggling in scope, and it's upending the old philanthropic pecking order faster than most people realize. We recently noted that Mark Zuckerberg and Priscilla Chan are now sitting on

a philanthropic fund larger than the Carnegie Corporation, and are ramping up major education giving.

Another Facebook billionaire, Dustin Moskovitz, has a fortune larger than the endowments of all but seven foundations, and he and his wife, Cari Tuna, are busy scaling up their own new giving outfit, Good Ventures. Meanwhile, fortysomething hedge fund guys that most philanthropoids have never heard of, like Bill Ackman, are charging into one issue area after the other with new ideas and large pots of grantmaking money -- often doled out as general operating support without micromanaging by program officers who need to justify their existence.

This is the kind of stuff I think about when contemplating what's cutting edge in philanthropy.

I also think of second generation philanthropists who are assuming control of multi-billion dollar fortunes and embracing new ways to give -- for instance, a person like Dave Peery, an heir to a \$2.2 billion Silicon Valley real estate pile who's revamped the family foundation, turning it into "an energetic

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operation with a sophisticated methodology and a portfolio of local, regional, and global grants that address issues of poverty," as we wrote recently.

Or I think of the master networkers who are changing philanthropy, many of whom are high-powered women. And how we live in an era where the ability to mobilize armies of like-minded donors can be more important than direct control of large pots of money. As Jacki Zehner, the CEO of Women Moving Millions told me, philanthropy is in the midst of "a shift to networking, knowledge sharing, and collaborating... No one person can solve problems."

Related, of course, I think of the profound effects of crowdfunding, driving by the idea that everyone can be a philanthropist if we empower them with the right tools and information. Given that foundations account for just a sixth of the philanthropic dollars spent annually, how can you have a discussion about what's cutting edge in philanthropy without looking at the new push to mobilize individual donors?

Another frontier I think about are efforts to radically change our ideas about generosity. I think about Bolder Giving, led by Jason Franklin, which is pushing wealthy people to not just give away some of their money; but to give away most of it. Or Resource Generation, which pushes young people of inherited wealth to ask deep questions about

where their money came from and where it should go.

Mind you, this is just my pet list of what's most fascinating right now in philanthropy. Other people reading this will have their own ideas about what's "cutting edge" -- particularly when it comes to new strategies for impact or grantmaking that truly empowers people (as opposed to infantilizing them, which is how many grantseekers feel the moment they walk through the doors of a major foundation).

One thing is clear: The frontiers of philanthropy are changing fast, and while places like Rockefeller, MacArthur, and Carnegie still command vast resources and do great work, you don't pull together the leaders of these institutions exclusively if you want to figure out where philanthropy is headed.