

The 13 Intentions of Philanthropy

Type	Intention	What it is
Communitarian <i>“We want to ...”</i>	1. Strengthen community	Giving to deepen belonging, solidarity, and to identity, religion, geography, shared experience.
	2. Give back or memorialize	Giving motivated by gratitude, legacy, memory, or personal resonance, to ensure that something (a project, event, place, principle, or organization) endures into the future.
	3. Build and sustain the commons	Giving to create and preserve shared infrastructure, be it physical (public spaces, institutions, cultural assets) or relational (trust, norms, dialogue). The focus is stewarding shared assets (material, cultural, and civic) to help people live, grow, and thrive together.
	4. Share joy and celebration	Giving to foster delight, beauty, pride, and celebration; less motivated by crisis or justice concerns than by an impulse to live life with joy (even in moments of hardship).
Transformative <i>“We hope to ...”</i>	5. Accelerate breakthroughs	Giving to spark leaps forward (scientific, cultural, economic), solve well-defined technical challenges, or open new frontiers of discovery.
	6. Tackle a major problem	Giving to help address significant, often systemic issues of broad concern and impact (regional, national, or global). This is where “traditional” large foundations often focus, and where the government hand-off theory of change factors most frequently.
	7. Advance flourishing	Giving to benefit society as a whole by fueling inquiry, discovery, and creativity in the sciences, arts, culture, and/or other humanistic endeavors. More focused on ongoing ferment and activity than on quantitative outcomes.
Declarative <i>“We feel compelled to ...”</i>	8. Elevate values	Giving to elevate specific cultural, moral, or professional principles, values, norms, and messages, frequently by celebrating excellence, identifying exemplars or role models, and telling stories.
	9. Build power	Giving to shift who has voice, agency, and influence over critical decisions and resources (often with communities historically excluded from power in mind).
	10. Take a stand	Giving that expresses and reflects moral convictions, even when systemic “success” may be uncertain or unlikely, and conveys solidarity, conscience, and presence.
Humanitarian <i>“We’re called to ...”</i>	11. Respond to a crisis	Giving to provide immediate relief and/or support long-term recovery during and after natural disasters, wars, pandemics, and other catastrophes.
	12. Offer a helping hand	Giving as an expression of shared humanity, love, and empathy, often when suffering is present. Quintessential “charity,” driven by multiple impulses (human, religious, ethical).
	13. Promote potential	Giving to support individual development and possibility, investing to help students, artists, leaders, thinkers, and changemakers expand their horizons, sustain their practice, amplify their reach, or otherwise fulfill their potential.

The table breaks down the intentions that animate American philanthropy into four groups: **communitarian, transformative, declarative, and humanitarian.**

Common examples and tactics	What success looks like
Tithing and other forms of religious giving; support for diasporic and minority groups; giving to community associations and block clubs.	Depth and continuity of relationships; intergenerational strength; mutual support, resiliency, and advocacy; cohesion, connection, and belonging, even in the absence of geographic reach or scale.
Place-based giving in a donor's hometown; memorials (e.g., 9/11, Holocaust, slavery); scholarships reflecting a loved one's priorities or memory; gifts to nonprofits, programs, hospitals, or educational institutions that impacted a donor.	Continued vitality and strength of an organization, institution, or project; continuity of memory and/or of narratives across generations; increased capacity to make progress on an issue of deep personal resonance.
Place-based giving to schools, parks, and "the public square"; support for museums, orchestras, libraries, and nonprofit media; initiatives that bridge divides through civic and interfaith dialogue and partnerships; advocacy for public support of those assets.	Durability and accessibility of shared institutions and spaces; sustained quality and relevance of those assets; increased social cohesion, including stronger civic bonds, trust, and dialogue across differences; sense of belonging and ownership across groups.
Parades and celebrations; neighborhood picnics and block parties; public art displays and music festivals.	Collective joy and pride; increased quality of life and measures of happiness; strengthened community bonds.
XPRIZE, Longitude Prize, and other point-solution prizes; biomedical funding for treatments and cures targeting specific ailments; infrastructure investments to unlock new insights and discoveries.	Achieving or progressing toward a breakthrough; generating new discoveries, approaches, and treatments. When achieved, breakthroughs often require government hand-off or private-sector support to broadly scale and share the benefits.
Funding for global health priorities; climate mitigation and adaptation; food security and water access; democracy; gender and health equity; mental health and emotional well-being; literacy, education, and workforce development; other UN Sustainable Development Goals.	Scaled impact (often quantifiable) on target issues (e.g., lives saved, emissions reductions, DALYs); system and policy changes that support the durability of those gains.
Funding and commissions for students, artists, and writers; unrestricted gifts to universities or cultural institutions; advocacy for government science and arts funding.	Vibrant culture of scientific, cultural, and artistic production; new insights that expand our understanding of the world and ourselves; contributions that enrich lives, generate awe, tell new stories, and open eyes.
Classic exemplar prizes (e.g., Nobel and Pulitzer prizes); campaigns like Pass It On billboards; storytelling through films, documentaries, publications, and podcasts.	Shifting cultural awareness, public understanding, and standards of excellence; (re)defining what "good" looks like; creating and broadly sharing narratives that inspire admiration, emulation, and potentially even action and behavior change ("narrative change").
Participatory grantmaking; support for grassroots organizations and movements; direct cash transfers and reparations; investments in leadership development; funding for civic engagement and movement infrastructure.	Shifts in policy and resource allocation; increased autonomy and civic/political strength; growth of participatory processes; greater representation and voice; resiliency of movements.
Support for protest movements, dissidents, independent media, and human-rights organizations; legal-defense funds.	Elevated visibility for neglected or oppressed voices and causes; creating common knowledge and social pressure that yields cultural and political change; encouraging others to bear witness.
Earthquake- and pandemic-relief funds; refugee-resettlement support; humanitarian food and aid programs; advocacy for government and multi-lateral action.	Speed and efficacy in addressing urgent needs and filling gaps in government capacity; recovery over time; increased resiliency in impacted communities and adaptive capacity to address future crises.
Soup kitchens, food pantries, and clothing drives; alms; GoFundMe campaigns; direct cash transfers; rehabilitation and vocational training programs; Maimonides' highest levels of tzedakah.	Alleviating suffering; supporting dignity and self-sufficiency; avoiding "hardening one's heart" or sitting in judgment; strengthening bonds in a community; affirming common humanity.
Academic scholarships; youth enrichment and opportunity programs; fellowships for exceptional thinkers and changemakers; unrestricted support for artists (e.g., Kresge Arts in Detroit, basic-income pilots); mentorship- and leadership-development initiatives.	Changes to life trajectory; individual transformation; sustained or even amplified reach and creative/intellectual output; capability development; access to networks, experiences, and resources that unlock new opportunities.