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## Upfront

### **A Lesson for the Left** **Study finds right-wing philanthropy gets more results**

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## PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

# A Lesson for the Left

## *Study finds right-wing philanthropy gets more results*

Left-leaning charitable groups tend to raise more money than their politically conservative counterparts, but they might not be getting as much bang for the buck.

An analysis by the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) suggests that conservative foundations opposing progressive social trends – including gay marriage and women’s studies programs at universities – allocate their funds more wisely and have more success affecting public policy than groups on the left.

While taking no stand on the worthiness of the causes these conservative groups were backing, the study did commend them for strategic spending, rather than just scattering funds around to small social service groups. It also said these conservative groups often gave “no strings attached” funds that recipients could use at their discretion without having to wait for a project-specific grant.

Such strategies often resulted in more widespread and long-lasting change. Citing the example of child hunger, the study noted that a foundation could give all its money to food shelters but might be more successful eradicating hunger if it worked to change legislation to make more people eligible for food stamps.

“The conservative foundations we studied have really prepared their grantees to be effective public policy players much more so than groups on the left,” said Jeff Krehely, executive director of the NCRP and author of the study, entitled “Axis of Ideol-

ogy: Conservative Foundations and Public Policy.”

By contrast, Krehely said that the charitable scene on the left looked more like a disparate group of well-meaning people preaching to their own particular choir, and often failing to organize into a unified bloc with a clearly defined and manageable agenda.

The NCRP studied spending patterns between 1999 and 2001 from 79 foundations it identified as conservative, including the Walton Family Foundation and the Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation. The report did not include grants to religious organizations in its analysis.

The study turned up several examples of conservative philanthropy having a near-term impact on education, business, civil rights, the military, and the environment. For example, the Heritage Foundation, which received \$28.6 million in grants between 1999 and 2001, used some of that money to take a vocal stance against gay marriage.

Unlike other groups that give all their funds to needy social services, Heritage devoted a fifth of its budget to media and governmental relations and another 21 percent to educational programs. Heritage has been widely credited with fortifying the conservative movement by training scholars and politicians, funding research papers that further the conservative agenda, and running a well-regarded media office that places its analysts and executives on television and radio shows.

John Von Kannon, Heritage’s vice president for development, said it’s no accident that conservative groups spent their money more wisely. “We have to be in touch with the marketplace because we don’t usually take federal grants,” he said.

The study also noted that several so-called academic change organizations were large recipients of conservative funds. The Intercollegiate Studies Institute, for example, monitors professors and universities for a “liberal bias” and even issued a list of professors singled out for overemphasizing white oppression of blacks.

“I thought the study was seminal,” said Rodger McFarlane, executive director of the Gill Foundation, which backs a number of liberal causes including gay and lesbian rights. “I’ve been raising money and overseeing foundations and I’ve long admired the effectiveness of the right.”

But the study was not without its critics, among them Leslie Lenkowsky, professor of philanthropic studies at Indiana University, who called the findings “ludicrous.”

Lenkowsky said the study failed to take a comprehensive look at some of the informal ways that groups influence public opinion, adding that liberal interests have been very successful in using the media to express their opinions. To the extent that more conservative policies were being adopted, he said, this reflected the sentiments of the American public, rather than the spending practices of conservative foundations.

—Andrea Orr