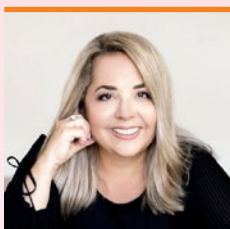


# Creating a culture of philanthropy



WORDS BY *Kimberly Downes*  
*Philanthropy and*  
*fundraising strategist*  
[www.kimberlydownes.com](http://www.kimberlydownes.com)

**I often am told by people in the not-for-profit sector that Australia will never have the same culture of philanthropy that exists in North America. That's just not true. Such a state of mind is all about education, consistency and stewardship.**

*“Creating a culture of philanthropy is within us.”*

Understanding the basis and history of philanthropy will assist any organisation in creating and strengthening their own organisational culture. In order to change things in your non-profit, you must first understand the existing attitude toward philanthropy and the whole process of cultivation, communication and stewardship.

The idea of philanthropy can be traced back to the Egyptians. In researching history, it is evident that all cultures and religions have included the concept of generosity and giving no matter their differences. The “strong helping the weak” ... “the rich helping the poor” has been the basis for philanthropy largely inspired over the ages by churches.

The word Philanthropy strictly translated from the two Greek words “philos” (love) and “anthropy” (humankind) means “the love of mankind”. It made its initial appearance in the play *Prometheus Bound* attributed to the Greek playwright Aeschylus (525–456 BCE). Prometheus is punished by the gods for giving man the gifts of fire and hope.

In the 19th century, non-religious organisations emerged, and individuals began to be recognised for philanthropic acts to non-religious organisations. In the late 1800s fundraising was organised and the most professional of the non-profits at that time was the YMCA in the United States, and later throughout the world.

An organisation with a strong culture of philanthropy often includes the following elements:

# 01

## A BOARD THAT IS DEMONSTRATING BY LEADING

It all begins at the top. If your leaders are fully engaged with the organisation then you are well on the way to a strong culture of philanthropy. Board members should each be involved in nurturing relationships, communicating the mission and vision of the organisation and engaging in strategy development.

How the organisation views the Board is also important. Factors such as how often the Board meets, what they discuss or impact, their length of term, the activities they are asked to participate in and if they are asked to make a gift should be considered.

So many CEOs shy away from wanting the Board to be asked. They feel they are already giving of their time. But to be an organisation with a strong culture of philanthropy, Board members must give of their time, talent and treasure.

# 02

## MISSION AND VISION DRIVEN GOALS

It is essential that each year the organisation starts off with an overall strategy. The Board, Senior Management and all staff must work from this strategy so that everyone is on the same page striving for the same outcome. This helps the fundraising staff to develop and drive their program. However, what far too many organisations lose sight of is that their mission and vision should not be a one-way form of communication. It is so important to listen to your donors; hear their “dreams” for the organisation.



# 03

## VALUE IN STAFFING, STRUCTURE AND PROCESSES

Often when budget cuts need to take place, the first cuts are in the fundraising and marketing departments because of the lack of value placed on what they do. How we organise ourselves and the systems we put in place says a lot about our culture of philanthropy.

Many organisations are so focused on “getting the gift” that they lose sight of what happens after the gift is received. If we steward our donors properly then the likelihood of another gift or increased gifts is most probable.

Stewardship involves proper recognition. Do you have a recognition policy in place? If not, it is paramount that you develop one and I would suggest having it approved by your Board so that they are also aware of what practices are in place to thank and keep your donors engaged with your organisation.

# 04

## STRONG COMMUNICATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS THAT IS NOT JUST ONE WAY

People give as they understand. If we do a really good job at communicating our story and listening to the donors’ interests then we are bound to find that we have a successful culture of philanthropy. It is essential to educate our prospects and listen to them as they will tell you what motivates another gift. We must listen to our constituents for without their feedback we will not grow and we will not develop or build our culture of philanthropy. How often do we send out a newsletter with stories we think are important to us but don’t allow the recipient any opportunity to respond? How often do we send out a thank you letter that is just a template? Are we picking up the phone to donors?

I recently heard a story about an organisation that picked up the phone to thank a donor for a \$1,000 gift. That donor was stunned and said that he gives millions away each year and never before had he received a call to thank him. I think that is the start of a wonderful relationship between that organisation and its donor.

Creating a culture of philanthropy is within us. We cannot compare ourselves to other countries or even other organisations as we are all different. What is essential is that we analyse who we are as an organisation and what we want to achieve.

A culture of philanthropy is not a program you can buy and install. It is a people-to-people matter. It is about understanding ourselves and each other as managers, volunteers and staff, knowing our values and how to act in the best interests of our organisation. ■