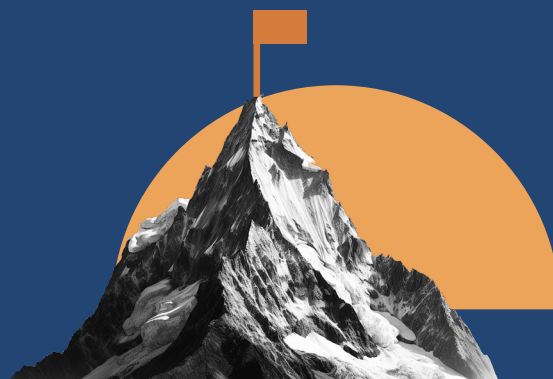




# High-Impact Philanthropy: Five Practices That Lead to Lasting Change

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# Contents

- Introduction 3
- Put impact first 5
- Set ambitious goals 8
- Appropriately resource your giving 11
- Embed data-driven learning 14
- Engage other actors 17
- The road ahead: Learning to give better 20
- Appendix: Methodology 21
- Endnotes 22

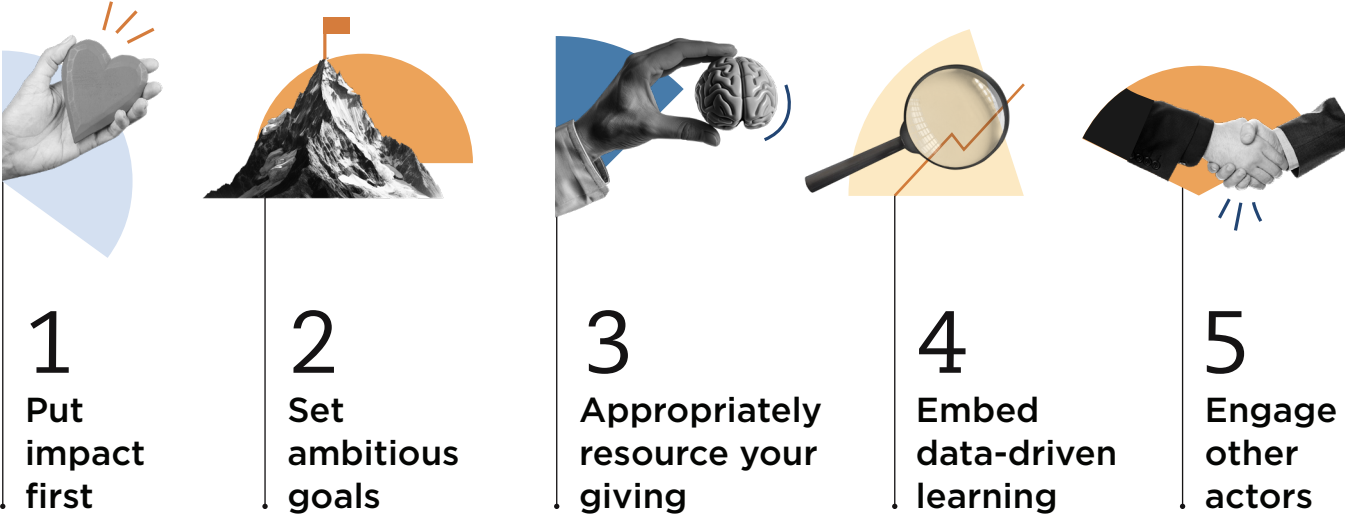
**Amongst high-impact philanthropies around the world that fund meaningful and enduring change, we find that they often employ similar practices. Here, we describe five high-impact practices and illustrate how they have played out in different contexts in Asia and elsewhere.**

Since its modest beginning in 1981, Tanoto Foundation has championed quality education for Indonesia’s children, particularly those living in rural areas. “My parents started their philanthropic work by investing in the schools around their factories,” says Belinda Tanoto, a member of Tanoto Foundation’s Board of Trustees. “They saw that kids were not getting access to good education.”

After two decades of investing in rural communities, providing adequate school facilities, and awarding scholarships to promising students, the foundation expanded its direct-service mission to support early childhood education and improve teacher training in the early 2000s. Buoyed by positive results, the Tanoto family, in 2017, was ready to think bigger and expand its impact worldwide. Supporting the foundation’s strategy refresh, the family established an endowment fund to enable expansion and longevity of the foundation’s impact. Soon after, Tanoto Foundation transformed “from a traditional direct-implementing entity into a collaborative, evidence-based, data-savvy philanthropic thought-leader” in pursuit of nationwide goals.<sup>[1]</sup>

The transformation included taking time to learn from peers around the world. After returning from a trip to the United States to visit and learn from leading foundations, the family committed to three operational shifts to achieve greater impact: forging partnerships with government and other stakeholders, using data to identify and promote best practices, and adequately resourcing educational improvements.<sup>[2]</sup>

These “high-impact” practices had proven effective in helping philanthropies across the globe fulfil their potential to enable sustainable progress on social and environmental issues. They constitute three of five such practices The Bridgespan Group has gleaned from more than 20 years of experience working with philanthropies and are validated by research on the practices of the largest institutional funders globally and in Asia. The five practices surface again and again in institutions that achieve meaningful and enduring positive change with their philanthropy:



The practices may appear simple and obvious, but we have found that embodying them over time is an uncommon discipline. The problems funders strive to address are always complicated; solving them requires patient progress and willingness to correct course over long periods. That kind of persistence and self-reflection is a skill in its own right for funders, and it helps to have fellow travellers who can share candid feedback, which is often less forthcoming from nonprofit leaders who are cautious about upsetting the power dynamic.

Challenges aside, the five practices are relevant for philanthropies around the world, just as good business practices resonate globally. However, the way they play out in the context of local culture, legal frameworks, and government policies often differs. In Asia, compared to the largest global funders, the high-impact practices adapt to a style of philanthropy that favours the provision of services directly and that often seeks partnerships with governments to advance national development goals.

Interest in such practices has accelerated in recent years as Asian wealth has soared and philanthropies look to expand on traditional approaches to giving, including through religious groups, clan associations, and corporates. Today, a growing number of Asian philanthropies are adopting strategies that align their giving with clearly defined goals and pursuing collaborative initiatives that pool capital and expertise to advance solutions.<sup>[3,4]</sup> This transition to a more structured way of giving coincides with a desire amongst many philanthropies to understand how to use their new wealth to achieve big, ambitious goals.

We chose to focus on institutional philanthropies because of their large and growing role in addressing chronic issues in education, health, economic development, and climate change. We recognise, however, that institutional philanthropy is just one approach to giving. Across Asia, small-scale informal giving by individuals historically has played a large part in assisting those in need. In addition, Asian philanthropy includes personal giving by high-net-worth individuals, giving via corporate social responsibility initiatives, and impact investing.

To learn more about high-impact practices amongst institutional philanthropies, The Bridgespan Group, with financial support from the [Institute of Philanthropy](#), compiled lists of the 20 largest institutional philanthropies in Asia and globally (see "[Largest Asian and Global Institutional Philanthropies](#)"). We reached out to a sample of funders from the lists to learn how they have applied high-impact practices to produce greater and lasting results. The profiled philanthropies would be the first to say that they are works in progress, but we think they are strong examples of how to apply the five practices in the real world. Below, we describe these high-impact practices in depth and offer examples of philanthropies that strive to live into each.



# 1 | Put impact first

High-impact institutional philanthropies are clear about the difference they intend to make in addressing social or environmental problems. This clarity of purpose lays the groundwork for defining what impact they seek. “A clear definition of impact is necessary to develop an effective and rewarding philanthropic strategy since impact definitions drive decisions and ultimately move dollars,” advises the Center for High Impact Philanthropy.<sup>[5]</sup>

Putting impact first means shifting away from “chequebook” style giving, a traditional approach in which the donor supports organisations based on affiliation, such as religious groups, clans, or communities with family or business ties. Instead, impact-first funders transition to a more intentional approach that deploys resources into initiatives with clearly defined goals and paths to impact.

To be sure, clarity of purpose does not mean dictating strategies to grant recipients or directing how they operate their programmes. High-impact philanthropies know when to defer to nonprofit leaders with deep lived experience, networks, and knowledge of communities and the field.

Such philanthropies centre their work on enabling positive, sustainable social and environmental change. The issues and objectives that they choose to focus on are often highly personal in nature, especially in Asia where family, business, and philanthropy are closely intertwined. Many choose to work on multiple issues, typically society’s most pressing challenges such as education, health, and poverty alleviation.

Regardless of their choice of issue area, high-impact philanthropies put impact first by acting with intention and a sense of urgency to improve the lives of individuals and communities. In doing so, they often consider the distinctive role they can play given their assets, skill sets, and expertise in specific issue areas. For example, [The Nippon Foundation](#) continues to advance efforts to eradicate leprosy, building on the years it has dedicated to the cause. Similarly, the [Tencent Foundation](#) leverages its unique technology assets and reach to make philanthropic giving more accessible to individuals in China.

Centring impact also means that philanthropies often focus on historically marginalised individuals and communities. Research shows this targeted approach can broadly benefit society, as illustrated by the “[curb-cut effect](#).” Curb cuts, sloped ramps from sidewalks to streets, were initially designed to aid wheelchair users. But curb cuts turned out to be helpful for so many others, including parents with strollers, cyclists, and travellers with rolling luggage.<sup>[6]</sup>



Focusing on marginalised groups goes beyond supporting specific programmes. High-impact philanthropies seek equitable outcomes as part of their desired impact and embed equity considerations across their strategies and impact measurement approaches. Where data on marginalised groups is in short supply, they support research to close data gaps and refine their approaches to better target these groups. By centring impact on marginalised groups, high-impact philanthropies are more likely to achieve deeper, lasting change.

*“We have a lot of power and money, but compared to the scale of the problems we are working on, they are a drop in the bucket. So, you have to be very strategic and smart about what you are working on and how you are entering the space.”*

— BRIAN QUINN, ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT, RESEARCH-EVALUATION-LEARNING, ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION

## The Shiv Nadar Foundation invests in the transformative impact of education

The [Shiv Nadar Foundation](#) in India has spent the past three decades building primary, secondary, and higher education institutions to ensure that quality education is available to all. “We invest deep rather than wide to change the trajectory of individuals’ lives,” says Roshni Nadar Malhotra, a foundation trustee.

The foundation’s approach is rooted in the belief that education is a powerful tool for social transformation. Through initiatives like [Shiv Nadar Universities, VidyaGyan, and Shiv Nadar School](#), the foundation has strived to build institutions that not only provide academic excellence but also nurture leadership, critical thinking, and social responsibility. These institutions have been designed to bridge the gap in access to quality education, particularly for students from rural and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

One of its flagship initiatives, [VidyaGyan](#), is a residential school established in 2009 to provide free, quality secondary school education to selected students from households with an income of less than approximately US\$2,400 per year and living in rural areas or urban slums. The programme began with a commitment to gender equity, initially reserving 30 percent of its spots for girls. Today, VidyaGyan says the percentage of girl students exceeds that of boys. Ninety-eight percent of VidyaGyan graduates have completed higher education, with many admitted to leading universities in India and abroad. This is indicative of the programme’s success given that more than 50 percent of youths in rural India are unable to do basic arithmetic taught in primary school, and only around 30 percent of youths aged 18 pursue higher education.<sup>[7]</sup> VidyaGyan continues to support its students beyond graduation, providing mentorship and skills training to help them thrive professionally.



“Our focus has always been on building impactful institutions,” says Nadar Malhotra. The long-term impact of these efforts extends far beyond the classroom, as students return to uplift their communities, creating a powerful multiplier effect. “You may not see the impact immediately, which is why you need to be consistent,” Nadar Malhotra continues. “As our founder, Shiv Nadar, often says, ‘Stay the course.’ We don’t mind waiting 10 years for the outcome.” Through its patient approach, the Shiv Nadar Foundation works to ensure that education becomes a lasting force for social and economic transformation.

## The Ford Foundation centres its work on ending inequality



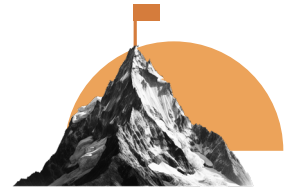
The [Ford Foundation](#) in the United States views inequality as the defining challenge of these times. Accordingly, it has put an impact-first stake in the ground by centring all its work on addressing the harmful political, economic, and cultural effects of inequality. To fulfil its commitment, the foundation has identified [five underlying drivers of inequality](#) that play out across continents, cultures, and disparate political contexts. It seeks to chip away at these drivers through grants in nine interconnected areas, such as civic engagement and government; disability rights; gender, racial, and ethnic justice; and natural resources and climate change.

Ford’s approach emphasises building institutions and networks, investing in individuals and leadership, and supporting new ideas, as these areas are central to its theory of how change happens in the world. Specifically on building institutions, Ford has a long history of providing capacity-building support to its grantees. As part of its social justice work, Ford provided international human rights groups, including Human Rights First, Global Rights, and Human Rights Watch, capacity-building support for decades. Today, its approach to capacity building has evolved and scaled into its [Building Institutions and Networks \(BUILD\) initiative](#), which provides a combination of long-term commitments, flexible funding, and institutional strengthening to help grantees become more resilient and effective.<sup>[8]</sup>

In addition to clarity about the areas where it seeks to achieve impact, the foundation is clear about its role. “Our theory of change is that the role of philanthropy is to support things from the ground up,” says Mattie Bekink, Ford’s regional director in China. “Many philanthropists are deeply passionate about specific causes and direct their giving accordingly, often without first considering what is truly needed,” says Bekink. “However, it’s essential to take the time to understand the actual needs before committing support, even if your passion leans in a particular direction.”

She offers this advice to help funders hone their impact commitment: “Listen to the stakeholders on the ground who are deeply engaged in whatever work you’re looking to fund and the communities that will benefit from it.” Funders who ask communities what the need is often accomplish more than those who arrive with a predetermined plan.

## 2 | Set ambitious goals



High-impact philanthropies establish ambitious goals that define the deep and sustainable change they seek in the world. In some instances, philanthropies aspire to population-level impact on issues such as education or health. For example, the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#), based in the United States, strives to enable children, adolescents, and adults in lower-income countries to live free from vaccine-preventable diseases by providing millions of vaccine doses. Other times, ambitious goals focus on a particular community, supporting individuals and families to transform their lives for the better. [Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies](#) in India invests in community-driven change efforts that tap local knowledge and resources to allow communities to take charge of their own development.<sup>[9]</sup>

Some philanthropies pursue ambitious goals by employing “futures thinking” to anticipate future challenges and use that knowledge to think strategically about how to allocate their funds. For example, [ClimateWorks Foundation](#) took this approach to explore how climate funders might respond to future volatility in food and critical minerals prices.<sup>[10]</sup> What makes these different approaches ambitious is that they are often audacious, yet achievable.

Regardless of scope, setting ambitious goals spur philanthropies to think beyond symptoms to root causes of social or environmental problems. This is often borne from a realisation that whilst there is a place for direct giving efforts in response to urgent needs, short-term interventions rarely achieve enduring impact. Tackling root causes can open new pathways to solutions that bring about real systems change.<sup>[11]</sup>

Ambition often requires high-impact philanthropies to lean into philanthropy’s unique position to deploy risk capital.<sup>[12]</sup> By making bold bets to develop new ideas and shape new approaches that others can then adopt, philanthropies de-risk these initiatives, often by providing seed capital to facilitate the infusion of additional money from governments or the private sector. Underwriting innovation brings new ideas to market and enables effective ideas that might otherwise remain under-resourced to scale ambitiously.

Success often requires balancing ambitious goals with a realistic approach. Whilst bold visions drive transformative change, success comes in incremental steps defined by time-bound milestones. Setting clear, measurable goals “big enough to matter, but small enough to win” allows organisations to track progress and adapt strategies over time.<sup>[13]</sup> This balance between vision and practicality ensures that resources are allocated effectively, avoiding the trap of committing long-term funding with no clear markers of success or chasing a grandiose but unattainable vision, and instead focusing on impactful, winnable outcomes along the way.

*“We try to solve the root causes of issues to create systemic change. Unfortunately, systemic change takes a long time before you can observe any real impact. So, you have to set milestones to make sure you are on the right track, evaluate, and learn from the lessons.”*

— ICHIRO KABASAWA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, THE NIPPON FOUNDATION



## The Tencent Foundation uses digital technology to increase individual giving

The Tencent Foundation developed an internet platform in China to bring philanthropy to the public by lowering barriers to participation.<sup>[14]</sup> The [Tencent Charity Platform](#) provides a popular app that allows users to make donations directly to certified nonprofit organisations. To date, the platform has more than 900 million donors who have given roughly US\$4 billion to over 30,000 philanthropic organisations.<sup>[15]</sup> “We’re proud of being the most used platform for donations in China,” says Liu Qin, vice secretary of the Tencent Foundation.<sup>[16]</sup>

Established in 2007, the foundation drew on the parent company’s technology expertise to develop its giving platform. The platform provides nonprofits access to individual donors via Tencent’s existing smartphone app. Using the app, individuals can see detailed information about nonprofits and their programmes, including goals, budgets, and implementation progress. Individual donors receive regular updates from the nonprofits they support, including fundraising status, fund allocation, and financial statements. This level of transparency promotes trust in nonprofits.<sup>[17]</sup>

The foundation’s goal is to promote more individual giving through digital technology. “In the next 10 years, we are thinking about how we can use the latest technology to further enhance efficiency and improve the public’s trust in the sector,” says Liu.



# Tanoto Foundation strives to strengthen early childhood development and education

Improving the quality of rural education in Indonesia has been central to Tanoto Foundation’s mission for decades. “Our thesis is that schools are the building blocks of society. If you want to alleviate poverty, you have to work through schools,” Belinda Tanoto told the *Jakarta Post*.<sup>[18]</sup>

The foundation’s efforts began modestly with the building of a kindergarten and elementary school in North Sumatra in 1981. Over the years, the foundation grew more zealous and compelled to drive impact globally. Today, it supports education and health care programmes in multiple countries, including Indonesia, Singapore, China, and Brazil. In the education sector, the foundation focuses on early childhood education and development, basic education, and leadership development.

Recognising the often-overlooked importance of early childhood development, the foundation has worked to strengthen this field and build an effective ecosystem. By partnering with like-minded local and international organisations, the foundation advocates for policy and system reforms, improving access to quality childcare services, and mobilising resources to catalyse change. In Indonesia, the foundation also works closely with the government to advance the national goal to reduce stunting prevalence, which has so far seen a reduction of almost 10 percentage points (from 31 percent in 2018 to 21.6 percent in 2023).<sup>[19]</sup> Lowering the stunting rate is essential to improving the quality of children’s lives and their readiness to learn.

Tanoto is pursuing an equally ambitious initiative in China to scale its [HOPE \(Harnessing Opportunity through Parenting and Education\)](#) programme for children in rural communities. HOPE, a proven model, provides caregivers with the knowledge and skills they need to promote the development of children up to age 3. The foundation has worked closely with partners, including government, to establish the programme in over 125 centres across rural areas with the ambition of using the model as a reference to inform policymaking.<sup>[20]</sup>





## 3 | Appropriately resource your giving

Whether a philanthropy operates its own programmes or awards grants, those that set ambitious goals are in it for the long haul. They not only make long-term commitments but also resource their giving to fully cover their nonprofit grantees' overhead and organisational development costs in addition to programme expenses. Both approaches run counter to the widespread practice of annual giving that caps non-programme costs at an inadequately low level.

Indeed, many philanthropies in Asia and elsewhere hesitate to put money into non-programme costs for fear that the expenditures would divert precious resources from what they care most about: impact. In fact, just the opposite is true. Failure to fund non-programme costs limits impact by compromising nonprofits' organisational strength (e.g. administrative support, leadership training, technology, and strategic planning) and thereby hampering their ability to serve people and communities in need.<sup>[21]</sup> It leaves nonprofits in a cycle of "starvation" that limits their sustainability and growth. That's why high-impact philanthropies are so attentive to paying what it takes for nonprofits to sustain their impact.

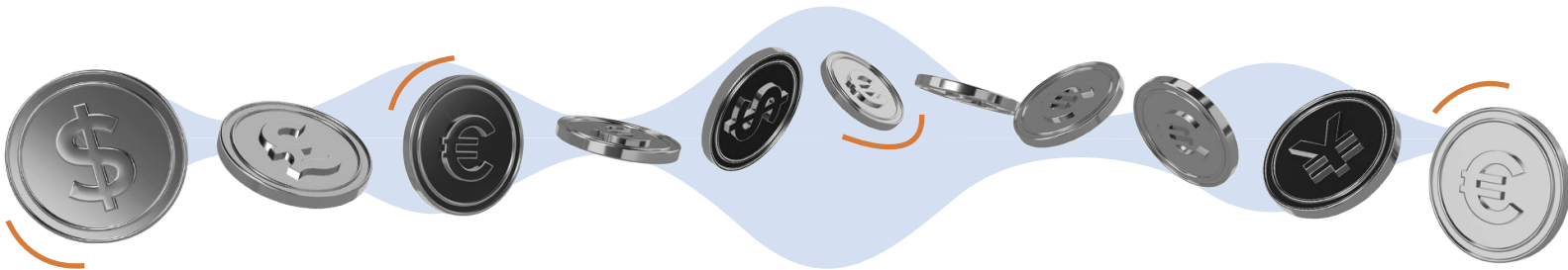
High-impact philanthropies also commit resourcing commensurate with the scale of their ambitions and at a speed that matches the urgency of the need. Not only do they engage in focused, sustained giving over the long term, they also remain responsive to an evolving environment. This was especially critical during the COVID-19 pandemic when nonprofits needed access to flexible unrestricted funding to adapt to a dynamic operating environment with evolving needs.<sup>[22]</sup> Drawing from this experience, funders are learning that providing flexible funding is not just needed in acutely uncertain times.<sup>[23]</sup> Sustained flexible funding helps cultivate "impactful, equitable partnerships between funders and nonprofits," empowering nonprofits to make decisions based on what is needed on the ground and build resilience against future crises.<sup>[24]</sup>

In addition, adequate resourcing is not just about money. Funders can bring a number of valuable non-monetary resources, such as networking with like-minded funders or nonprofits and organising convenings that serve as platforms for sharing knowledge, as well as training programme staff in specific skills. Indeed, at least 60 percent of the largest funders globally and in Asia are doing so through field building activities which include providing technical assistance to grantees, other nonprofits, and government; developing external technology platforms; conducting research and research dissemination; pursuing efforts to inform policy; and organising convenings, exchanges, and forums.<sup>[25]</sup>

To be sure, when committing to multiyear funding, high-impact philanthropies match the level of funding with their stated goals. A mismatch would undermine the purpose of multiyear commitments. When starting a new grantee relationship, it can make sense to provide smaller, shorter-term grants to allow for learning and relationship building, paving the way for larger, multiyear grants. In our previous research on "big bets" (grants of US\$10 million or more from US-based donors to a social change organisation or cause between 2000 and 2012), we found that the big-bet recipients received a median of four previous grants from the donor prior to the big bet.<sup>[26]</sup>

*“Flexibility in providing general operating support is important. Without flexible funding, nonprofits are constrained in what resources they can use to innovate and to invest in their systems, processes, and people. There is also the question: Where does the expertise lie? Nonprofits bring critical expertise, including because of their proximity to people affected by the issues. Flexibility to adjust and adapt your giving in response to what nonprofits say they need is important.”*

— JEHAN VELJI, DIRECTOR, EFFECTIVE PHILANTHROPY GROUP, WILLIAM AND FLORA HEWLETT FOUNDATION



## **Ford Foundation programme shows the value of unrestricted, flexible giving**

In 2015, the Ford Foundation launched the BUILD initiative, which designated US\$1 billion in flexible funding to social justice organisations around the world. At the time, it was a bold move that ran counter to the widespread philanthropic practice of awarding programme grants with limited support for other core costs, such as administrative expenses or organisational development. Bridgespan research in the United States has shown that lack of support for critical non-programme costs caused more than half of the nonprofits we surveyed to struggle with budget deficits.<sup>[27]</sup> In India, eight out of 10 nonprofit survey participants reported challenges in receiving critical non-programme financial support.<sup>[28]</sup>

Ford’s bet on BUILD paid off. An evaluation report concluded that “multiyear, unrestricted funding combined with dedicated institutional development leads to stronger, more resilient organisations of all structures, sectors, and sizes—and deeper connections to the communities they serve.”<sup>[29]</sup> As a result, Ford renewed its commitment to BUILD with another US\$1 billion in grant dollars over five years beginning in 2022.

As it launched BUILD, Ford also set out to end the [nonprofit starvation cycle](#) by committing to raise the cap on indirect-cost coverage in all of its grants. Indirect costs cover a range of expenses not specifically tied to programmes. In 2023, Ford raised its indirect-cost rate to 25 percent, nearly double the amount US foundations typically provide to grantees, to ensure that grantees have the flexibility to cover the actual costs of their work.<sup>[30]</sup>

Ford’s experience meeting grantees’ funding needs is not lost on philanthropies that operate their own programmes rather than awarding grants. Initiatives run by operating foundations also benefit from appropriate resourcing of non-programme expenditures critical to meeting the administrative and operational needs of highly effective initiatives.

## The Shiv Nadar Foundation fully funds educational institutions



The Shiv Nadar Foundation is committed to fully funding and operating its educational institutions, having invested over US\$1.5 billion in the past 30 years. These investments have led to the creation and support of five institutions striving to provide world-class instruction, spanning primary grades to higher education. “Our vision revolves around building and nurturing institutions. We create them, support them, and hope that, in time, some will become self-sustaining,” explains Roshni Nadar Malhotra, a foundation trustee. Until that is achieved, the foundation continues to fully cover all operational costs.

Limiting the number of students to around 15,000 across all its institutions allows the foundation to emphasise quality over quantity. “We are often asked why we don’t invest in programmes that impact millions instead of focusing on a relatively small group. But our philosophy has always been to prioritise depth over breadth,” Nadar Malhotra explains. This approach aims to provide every student with a transformative education experience designed to nurture individual potential.

For instance, the foundation invests around US\$40,000 per student enrolled in VidyaGyan, its residential school for rural students, an amount far higher than the average cost of private schooling in India. To make this opportunity accessible to the most deserving, the foundation covers travel costs for all applicants to their test centres and facilitates campus visits for selected students and their families. In addition, the foundation invests in its 181 teachers, providing tailored, ongoing professional development to enhance students’ learning outcomes.

Whilst fully funding its educational initiatives, the foundation also recognises the importance of investing in critical infrastructure and human resources. “You can’t just arbitrarily limit administrative costs to 5 or 10 percent,” Nadar Malhotra points out. “We ensure that the right people and resources are in place because they are essential to delivering quality programmes.” This holistic approach reflects the foundation’s commitment to creating institutions that prioritise student excellence, innovation, and sustainability in the long term.





## 4 | Embed data-driven learning

Given the complex and ever-changing nature of social and environmental issues, philanthropies recognise the need to continuously test and re-test approaches to learn what works. For high-impact philanthropies, data is more than just a tool for reporting or auditing. It is a tool for learning and decision-making to maximise the impact of their investments.

Data-savvy philanthropies anchor their work in evidence using both quantitative and qualitative information. They build their giving and their programmes on rigorous analysis of what has been proven effective, and when that evidence is lacking, they generate it themselves. Through ongoing measurement and evaluation, they continuously test hypotheses, refine strategies, and adapt to get better.

Data collection happens in a variety of ways, such as surveys, interviews, focus groups, observations, or case studies. High-impact philanthropies attempt to right-size their data requirements and guard against unintentionally burdening nonprofits with time-consuming collection and reporting. They recognise the dangers of paralysis by analysis and tailor the scope of data gathering to specific decision-making needs. They also take pains to ensure they gear their measurement approaches to support rather than penalise grantees – helping nonprofits see the value of impact measurement, acquire relevant impact measurement skills and knowledge, and refine their approaches, rather than holding them to unrealistic standards.

Additionally, high-impact philanthropies often strive to include the voices of those in the communities served.<sup>[31]</sup> This ensures the data gathered is not only reflective of a foundation’s objectives but also rooted in the lived experiences of communities. By engaging in dialogue with grantees, funders gain critical insights into the on-the-ground realities of programme implementation, allowing them to understand challenges, successes, and areas for improvement.<sup>[32]</sup> This two-way feedback not only helps philanthropies refine their strategies and funding models, it also fosters stronger, more equitable relationships with grantees, ensuring that the voices of those executing the work inform decision-making processes.

Outcomes are particularly difficult to measure when initiatives involve systems change or narrative shifts. In such cases, organisations can benefit from tracking meaningful outputs as progress indicators.<sup>[33]</sup> By doing so, they can demonstrate incremental progress even in areas where the outcomes are harder to quantify or can only be measured over the long term.

Despite the clear benefits of data-driven learning, there remains significant room for improvement in philanthropy, especially when it comes to measuring and sharing outcomes data. Whilst the largest Asian philanthropies are less likely to publish outcomes data than their global counterparts, nearly half of the largest global funders do not report outcomes data.<sup>[34]</sup> This suggests an opportunity for institutional philanthropies to strengthen their impact by investing in outcomes tracking – both qualitative and quantitative.

*“You need to be alert on whether you are collecting the right data. There is a danger that you could be collecting all sorts of data where you are not learning anything, and it’s a big burden on grantees. The quality of data and doing it in partnership with partners is important, so that you truly learn. Measurement, evaluation, and learning has to be adaptive and learning based.”*

— NANCY LINDBORG, PRESIDENT AND CEO, THE DAVID AND LUCILE PACKARD FOUNDATION

## Yayasan Hasanah uses measurement for learning and accountability

[Yayasan Hasanah](#), Malaysia’s largest foundation, developed its [EMPACT](#) measurement framework – which stands for Empowerment, Partnership, Accountability, Collaboration, and Trust – to foster a culture of continual learning amongst its partners and enhance accountability. “Learning is more difficult than you think; you really have to ask the right questions and be genuine about learning,” says Aditi Malhotra, Hasanah’s chief impact officer. “The challenge lies in whether we are able to use those lessons to inform decision making.”

Hasanah learnt over the years that many of its nonprofit partners may not necessarily have the capacity to design and implement monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL). “We realised we had to take a step back to explain to our partners and the ecosystem the basics of monitoring and evaluation, its value in project design, and role in effective delivery,” says Malhotra. “We also shifted the focus of monitoring and evaluation from being a reporting mechanism to a learning mechanism. Once we did that, partners became more open to sharing and learning; the process became less intimidating.”

To bring its partners along the monitoring and evaluation journey, Hasanah redesigned its approach to help its partners build measurement capacity to effectively monitor programmes for real-time learning, and to adapt programme approach based on data collected or feedback received. It invites partners to training workshops to learn the basics of MEL and assists with on-site visits during the measurement process. Hasanah is also working on an online “academy” for its partners where they can access articles, research, and recorded discussions covering a range of development topics, including a [handbook](#) that shares best practices on programme design and MEL.<sup>[35]</sup>



## Tanoto Foundation invests in measurement to learn and improve

Tanoto Foundation prioritises investments in measuring the impact of its programmes to learn how to make them more effective. Evaluation is essential to the foundation's goal of continuous learning and improvement, programme expansion, and amplification of overall impact.

For example, through data collection and impact evaluation, Tanoto Foundation learned how to enhance the impact of its early childhood education and development (ECED) centres. The foundation's research found that parents who participated in its ECED programme had better child development and parenting practice outcomes, indicating a need to create greater awareness amongst parents of the importance of good parenting practices and to encourage greater programme participation. Data-driven investments also help the foundation build its credibility with government partners when promoting the adoption of its programmes.

Beyond evaluating its own programmes, the foundation invests in related research. "We work with researchers and academics to study the impact of our work," says Trustee Belinda Tanoto. In collaboration with [Alive & Thrive](#), a global nutrition initiative, the foundation commissioned a [study to improve infant and young children's nutrition](#) as part of the Indonesia government's stunting reduction strategy. The foundation also collaborated with Asia Philanthropy Circle on a [regional early childhood development study](#) to guide stakeholders' efforts to support programme development.

In China, Tanoto Foundation launched an implementation science research project with with the [Center for Experimental Economics in Education](#) at Shaanxi Normal University to evaluate and improve the HOPE programme for early childhood development. The study will inform the foundation's decision-making and potentially provide a reference for local governments in designing and implementing early childhood services and policies.







## 5 | Engage other actors

Funder collaboration is a growing trend globally.<sup>[36]</sup> After all, the problems philanthropies are addressing are too big and complex for one organisation to solve. A 2020 report by AVPN, Asia's leading social investment network, concluded that “with a growing and diversifying philanthropic environment, cross-sector, multi-stakeholder collaboration at scale is becoming more viable.”<sup>[37]</sup> Jagannatha Kumar, CEO of [Reliance Foundation](#), agrees: “To accelerate sustainable development, we need bold, ambitious, and evidence-based approaches which are powered by philanthropic capital, diverse partnerships, and exceptionally talented people.”

Philanthropies collaborate with one another in a variety of ways, from simply sharing information to pooling money to forge innovative solutions to challenges in education, health, and economic development.<sup>[38]</sup> Particularly in Asia, philanthropies demonstrate a strong desire to help achieve national development goals, which often means partnering with government. Government not only sets the national development agenda, it also provides resources to scale effective programmes piloted by philanthropic organisations.<sup>[39]</sup> By collaborating with government, philanthropies have an opportunity to expand and integrate successful pilot projects into national programmes, amplifying their impact.

Asian philanthropies also are turning to the communities they serve for guidance on designing and implementing effective programmes. For decades, philanthropy has foisted its expertise on communities to address pressing social issues. By contrast, approaches such as “trust-based philanthropy” and “community-driven change” seek to flip the script.

With trust-based philanthropy, funders approach their grantees from a place of trust and collaboration rather than compliance and control.<sup>[40]</sup> That may mean simply giving grants with no strings attached, which allow nonprofits to apply the funds for any purpose that helps them achieve their missions, including building their organisations.<sup>[41]</sup> Or it may mean creating space for both funders' and nonprofits' relative strengths and assets to fully contribute towards shared objectives.

Community-driven change seeks to put communities in charge of charting their own development plans by tapping into local knowledge and expertise to achieve results. This approach encourages institutional philanthropies to act as facilitators to co-create solutions with communities. When communities take ownership of their own development trajectories, the resulting programmes are often more culturally relevant and holistic. There is also a greater focus on marginalised groups, making the change more equitable as social norms and mindsets shift to elevate their voices.<sup>[42]</sup> Such an approach recognises that funders, nonprofits, and local communities each bring unique strengths to the table, and only through mutual respect and collaboration can shared objectives be realised.

Moreover, the role of the private sector cannot be overlooked in collaborative efforts. By engaging corporate actors, institutional philanthropies can explore new financing models, such as impact investing or blended finance to unlock more capital towards social and environmental outcomes. These collaborations can lead to the development of scalable solutions that deliver social or environmental impact in economically sustainable ways, making it easier to tackle systemic challenges that philanthropy alone might not be able to resolve.

Effective partnerships are built on trust. Institutional philanthropies that have successfully partnered with others typically approach the relationship from a place of humility, prioritising open communication and a willingness to listen. Trust is built when all partners have a clear understanding of each other's goals, capacities, and limitations. By sharing data, lessons learned, and best practices with other funders, governments, communities, and private entities, institutional philanthropies can help create an ecosystem of learning and accountability that drives continuous improvement and innovation.

*“We need to be very open to listening on the ground to communities and organisations. Otherwise, our ambitious purpose will really remain a purpose that is ours – it’s engineered in the boardroom as opposed to being co-created with the community.”*

— ADITI MALHOTRA, CHIEF IMPACT OFFICER, YAYASAN HASANAH



## **Tanoto Foundation makes partnerships integral to its philanthropic activities**

Partnering with other actors is critical to Tanoto Foundation's work globally. “We have always been proactive and open-minded about collaborating with other stakeholders because we know that we cannot achieve our ambitious goals alone,” says Belinda Tanoto, a trustee. An important step to the process is “mapping out key stakeholders and then aligning by seeking to find commonalities in our objectives and approaches,” she adds. “Strategic collaboration can amplify its reach to address complex challenges at scale. It’s about scaling what works, adapting it to different local contexts, and sharing learnings across geographies to improve the lives of millions of young children, and achieving our collective goals.”

In China, Tanoto Foundation has adopted a collaborative philanthropic approach to implementing its HOPE programme, where it has established early childhood development activity centres in rural areas of China and trained centre facilitators. In addition, the foundation participates in a nonprofit collaborative fund that supports long-term initiatives for ECED development. The collaborative includes the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Li Foundation, XinHe Foundation, Yeh Family Philanthropy, China Foundation for Rural Development, and the China Development Research Foundation. The fund goes beyond just pooling resources. It leverages collective knowledge, experience, data, and networks to scale effective solutions and drive systemic change.

In Indonesia, Tanoto Foundation joined with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in 2019 as a founding donor to the World Bank's Global Procurement Partnership Multi-Donor Trust Fund for Indonesia Human Capital Acceleration, an initiative that catalysed US\$14.6 billion from the Indonesian government to reduce stunting due to chronic malnutrition.<sup>[43]</sup> When the foundations joined the trust fund, their backing had the effect of “de-risking the investment and created a catalyst for other funders,” Tanoto explains.

## Yayasan Hasanah seeks community guidance on priority investments

Yayasan Hasanah believes in empowering communities to determine their own development needs, a form of community engagement gaining ground amongst funders.<sup>[44]</sup> “Philanthropy has to respond to a community; it has to be a dialogue,” says Aditi Malhotra, the chief impact officer. “If it starts becoming prescriptive, that is a failure of philanthropy. We are not solving for ourselves; we are enabling solutions via funding, and therefore, we need to take a bit of power away from ourselves as philanthropists and give it to the organisations and communities we work with. They are best placed to know what solutions work.”

Hasanah’s [community-based approach](#) (CBA) reflects this philosophy. The CBA seeks to empower communities to be economically, socially, and environmentally resilient. Recognising that poverty is a complex issue, the CBA employs a long-term, multidimensional approach that considers the needs of individuals and collectives (family or community).

For example, in urban communities, Hasanah partners with a “backbone” organisation that works directly with the community, typically through an income-generation project. As the partner builds trust with community, it identifies other needs such as childcare, nutrition, or mental health. Based on these findings, Hasanah provides additional funding for the backbone partner to connect with other organisations with specific expertise to deepen and broaden the scope of community interventions.

In rural communities, the CBA is delivered differently as the context, needs, and resources available are different. Hasanah typically works with one partner that aims to address multiple communitywide issues. The implementing partner must take into account the community’s culture, norms, and practices when developing programme priorities.

Malhotra adds, “We need to be very open to listening on the ground to communities and organisations. Otherwise our ambitious purpose will really remain a purpose that is ours – it’s engineered in the boardroom as opposed to being co-created with the community.”



# The Road Ahead: Learning to Give Better

Around the globe, philanthropic organisations have the resources and determination to improve the lives of millions of people in need of better educational opportunities, health care, skills training, environmental quality, and more. The five high-impact practices described above have guided a growing number of these organisations in delivering meaningful and enduring change.

In Asia, the practices are helping to shape a new, still emerging chapter in philanthropy. The Asian economic boom of recent decades has redrawn the global wealth map. Today, “there are 896 billionaires in Asia, more than any other part of the world (America has 746), with a combined US\$3.4 trillion in assets,” declares *The Economist*.<sup>[45]</sup> Amongst those well-positioned to take bold steps are Asia’s institutional philanthropies. What is clear from our conversations with a number of their leaders is that these organisations aspire to do more and do it better. Where there are doubts about how to proceed, we hope the five high-impact practices described above offer a starting point. They also create an opportunity to learn by doing as organisations shape these practices to fit their unique values and priorities.

Wherever it is pursued, an impact-focused approach to giving has demonstrated its value in helping to create sustainable results. By giving better, faster, and more, Asian institutional philanthropies can help foster more equitable societies and ensure that the remarkable economic growth seen across Asia translates into inclusive and sustainable development for all.

*Gwendolyn Lim, Pritha Venkatachalam, and Jeff Bradach are partners at The Bridgespan Group’s Singapore, Mumbai, and San Francisco offices, respectively. Xueling Lee is a principal and Denise Chew a consultant based in Bridgespan’s Singapore office. Roger Thompson is an editorial director in Bridgespan’s Boston office. The authors are grateful for the indispensable help of Julia Finnerty, a consultant in Bridgespan’s Singapore office.*

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# Appendix: Methodology

## **APPROACH: IDENTIFYING THE FIVE PRACTICES**

To identify the five key practices that enable high-impact philanthropy, The Bridgespan Group drew on more than 20 years of experience collaborating with and advising philanthropic and nonprofit social change leaders.

We have had the privilege of working with many of the world's leading donors to translate their giving aspirations into action and impact. Through these trusted relationships, we have built a deep understanding of what it takes to give in a way that is purpose-driven and gets results. This work gives us firsthand insight into what approaches accelerate philanthropies' ability to live into their aspirations – and what approaches do not.

We also have had the privilege of helping thousands of nonprofits achieve their ambitious visions for impact, drawing on our data-driven approach and focus on results. This work has allowed us to see firsthand what philanthropic practices consistently unlock or impede impact.

Based on that experience, we identified five high-impact philanthropic practices that come up again and again in our work globally. We then tested those practices in interviews with principals and staff of the largest institutional philanthropies, especially those in Asia, with a focus on funders who have achieved high impact and demonstrated significant thought leadership.

We then sought to bring the practices to life by profiling the work of five institutional philanthropies drawn from our lists of the largest global and Asian funders. In deciding which funders to profile, we prioritised those with strong track records of giving at scale in a consistent fashion (based on their average annual giving from 2018 to 2022) as well as enabling impact (based on publicly available information on the social and environmental outcomes). We approached several funders and featured only those who agreed to be profiled.

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## ABOUT THE BRIDGESPAN GROUP

The Bridgespan Group ([www.bridgespan.org](http://www.bridgespan.org)) is a global nonprofit that collaborates with social change organizations, philanthropists, and impact investors to make the world more equitable and just. Bridgespan's services include strategy consulting and advising, sourcing and diligence, and leadership team support. We take what we learn from this work and build on it with original research, identifying best practices and innovative ideas to share with the social sector. We work from locations in Boston, Delhi, Johannesburg, Mumbai, New York, San Francisco, Singapore, and Washington, DC.

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