

GROWING A CULTURE OF PHILANTHROPY

During this challenging economic climate,
the need to give is greater than ever

> By Wendy Chang

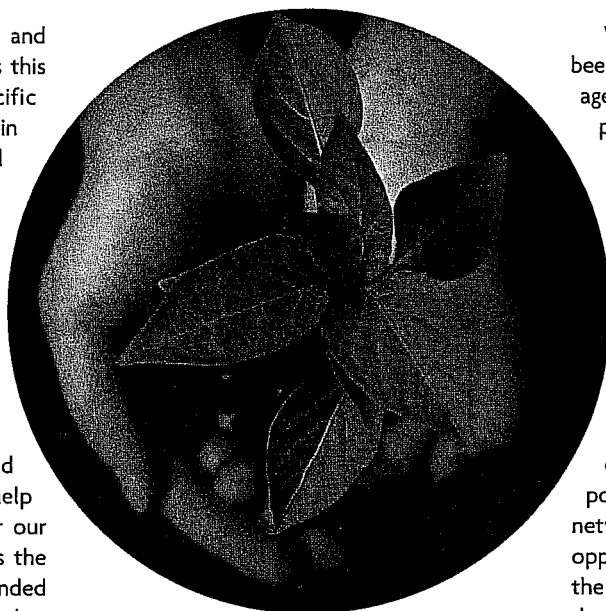
THIS is a time of great challenge and change. Like other communities across this nation, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) are confronting the pain of our severe economic climate, as well as growing social, political and environmental uncertainties. The needs that have always been great have become even greater. So it may sound strange for many to read what I'm about to say, but during this time, it is imperative that we give and give big.

As someone who has been working in nonprofits and foundations for 20 years, I'm in the business of giving, and lately, my challenge has been how to help shape the culture of philanthropy for our community during these times. This is the same community that has long contended with the "model minority" myth, which has served as a barrier to funding for programs promoting our health, welfare and civic voice. And as much as AAPIs have grown in numbers over the years, foundation funding to our communities has not kept up with that pace. A 2007 report published by Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy found that while our population has increased to comprise 4.5 percent of the U.S. population, foundation money to AAPIs represented just four-tenths of a percent of all U.S. foundation dollars, a slight increase from two-tenths of a percent between 1983 and 1990.

Clearly, we can no longer afford to wait for institutional philanthropy or government to "do the right thing." Now, more than ever, it is important that we all contribute and leverage our resources to uplift our communities.

But how can we think about helping others when we may be facing our own personal difficulties? When we feel we do not have enough, how can we give to others?

The truth is, our nation is suffering now because of the damage rendered by individual



greed and the short-term-profit mentality. What I try to tell fellow AAPIs is, as we share this pain, let's also open ourselves up to new possibilities as a collective. And in fact, there will be no better time to get a good "return on investment" than now. Doing anything great is a cumulative process, not a single act. You need not wait to give until you have a large sum of money. A contribution at any level is your engagement in the community.

While there are many forms of philanthropic giving, there are some exciting new trends that involve leveraging our contributions, and many come in the form of social networking.

Giving circles, though based on an old idea, have actively come into the philanthropic landscape in the past few years with a growing number started by Asian Americans. The circles are pooled funds, with members contributing either in equal amounts, from anywhere between \$50 to \$10,000, or according to what's comfortable. Leadership and decision-making is often shared by the collective, and thus there are low or no administrative costs.

While galas and other events have always been fundraising staples for many community agencies, there is a new breed of event that is produced by its participants. For example, Project by Project is an organization of social entrepreneurs that serve Asian American nonprofits in need by raising awareness, volunteerism and capital. The agency identifies a community cause each year and then customizes a campaign, including a fundraising event, for that recipient, who gets 100 percent of proceeds.

On this same theme of social gatherings, house parties are also becoming a popular vehicle. In addition to the social networking benefit, they also provide an opportunity to contribute to a cause, minus the hard sell part and with low or no "production" costs. It is also becoming more common to mix personal philanthropic activities with business, with more entrepreneurs giving a percentage of sales from their products to causes they care about.

Of course, a person's contribution of time and talent is the greatest resource in the social sector. My personal involvement on nonprofit boards and volunteer programs has given me so many gifts. Not only do I get to live out my values, but I also see the true beauty of humanity and have developed life-long friendships.

Connection, engagement, friendship, and leverage — these are the currencies of new philanthropy. Let's rise to the challenge of these times by fostering a culture of giving, which in turn, will nurture healthy, hopeful communities. It takes individuals like yourselves to make that happen, to make that difference — *you* are the one you've been waiting for. ☐

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