

# Engaging Women in Significant Philanthropy

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At the turn of the millennia, a new model for women in philanthropy began to emerge. Rather than the check-writing, gala-planning, raffle-running methods of past decades, this form of charitable giving commanded fresh respect. It was sophisticated. It was active. It matched the pace and mood of many of San Diego's emerging class of female business owners, entrepreneurs and community leaders. It was obvious to the San Diego Foundation, a community foundation that gravitates to the leading edge of change, that women's traditional patterns of giving were shifting -- yet full-scale philanthropy was still uncharted territory for many women. A vision for an organization that would promote the participation and leadership of women in charitable giving began to take shape. In 2000, the San Diego Foundation and a group of its volunteers founded the San Diego Women's Foundation, putting a fresh new female face on philanthropy.

Created as a supporting organization of the San Diego Foundation, the San Diego Women's Foundation now has 257 members, each of whom commits to an annual minimum contribution of \$2,000 for five years. Each member has one vote to determine where grants are awarded each spring. The pooled resources of many women giving together adds up. A total of \$848,000 has been awarded to 27 community partners to initiate or improve existing programs. And the grants themselves are significant sums, not less than \$25,000 each. Annually, SDWF focuses on a single area of critical need such as health and human services, civil society, economic development, the environment or arts and culture.

Because SDWF takes the position that all issues are women's issues, the Foundation does not focus on granting to women and girls only.

The founding members envisioned a legacy beyond their lifetimes. Half of each member's annual contribution is allocated to a permanent endowment fund. The foundation's endowment is nearing \$1 million, ensuring that the organization will be able to sustain its work in perpetuity.

"We have created a unique model that enables us to leverage not only our financial resources, but our intellectual capital as well," says Alicia Foster, incoming SDWF president. "By building on the tradition of service, tapping our members' expertise, making important community connections and giving strategically, we are becoming a positive force in our region."

Grants have helped babies begin life with stable families, enabled low-income women to start businesses and develop career paths, assisted homeless men in finding job opportunities, and helped children learn the joys of caring for the environment.

This is a very hands-on form of philanthropy. "Because of your rigorous granting process, your tough questions, the involvement during the grant cycle, we felt motivated to do an even better job," commented Mindy Waltrous from Walden Family Services. "Most people just give the check and we never hear from them again."

"You are setting a new standard ... staying in touch like this and actually being interested in the work we are doing reminds all of us of why we are doing what we're doing," said Gale Walker of the grantee organization Bronze Triangle. "It's the meaningfulness of the work."

Yet, there is so much more to do. Programs that assist with basics such as health care and food subsidies have been reduced or eliminated at federal, state and local levels. Funding for the arts and culture has all but disappeared. In the wake of these cutbacks, private philanthropic organizations such as the SDWF attempt to fill the gap. To do that, more resources are needed and that means more members bringing their work, wisdom and wealth to bear on the problems at hand.

By all accounts, it's pleasant work, meaningful and even fun. "I have learned the value of my contribution of my time and money, no matter how large or small," observed one SDWF member. Another shared, "It has taken the capital 'P' off 'philanthropy' and made it more accessible in an everyday application."

"As we grow, we will work to maintain a good balance between significant giving and a flexible, fun organization that encourages contact among our members and with our community partners," says Foster. "We will also work to better explore and serve our region's needs. In keeping with our structure, our members will vote on the choices for our future."

This high-touch, very engaged form of giving may well be a model of the philanthropy of the future. It seems to match the charitable inclination of a growing number of San Diegans.

#### **2005 Grant Awardees, Grant Amounts and Projects:**

The AjA Project in City Heights -- \$40,000 -- For equipment to support this project in which refugee youth learn to express themselves through photography, alleviating the sense of despair, loss and alienation that many of them experience, and fostering a sense of belonging in their new community.

Eveoke Dance Theater: Young Artists Program -- \$28,000 -- To expand a program in which promising young amateurs supplement the work of professionals in this award-winning dance company, with the goal of fostering social action through arts education.

La Jolla Playhouse: Enriching Children's Lives Through Theater -- \$17,000 -- To bring high-quality theater experiences to local schools, to give children the opportunity to write and perform their own plays and to provide theater training for teachers.

San Diego Museum of Art: Outreach and Family Festivals -- \$37,000 -- For after-school arts programs in community centers followed by festivals that bring schoolchildren and their families to the museum, making the arts accessible to economically disadvantaged people.

San Diego Opera: Pre-Opening Student Performances -- \$50,000 -- To help cover the expense of pre-opening opera performances for schoolchildren, the culmination of a classroom program that exposes students to all aspects of opera.

San Diego Symphony: Sound Connections Project -- \$41,000 -- To launch an innovative program that will engage schoolchildren in the concert experience and help them understand the creative process and the relationship between music and other art forms.

Sushi Performance & Visual Art: Artists Advisory Board Showcase Concerts -- \$27,000 -- To identify, support and present outstanding emerging choreographers and performance artists from the San Diego/Tijuana region to arts audiences, patrons and professionals.

*Julie Dubick is the 2003-2005 SDWF president, and Linda Katz was the founding president. They can be reached at the San Diego Foundation at (619) 235-2300.*

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