

FAMILY FOUNDATION *Advisor*

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Commentary

The Best of Charitable Intentions: Family Foundations Doing Good Without Doing Harm

Dr. Pamela Ryan*

There is a tantalizing premise behind the very existence of most family foundations: that philanthropy does ‘good.’ Family foundations are all predicated on and bound by the word “charitable...” Charitable is variously defined by dictionaries as “full of love and good will toward others;” “giving money, food, or help free to those who are in need because they are ill, poor, or have no home.”¹ Families establish family foundations for a myriad of reasons, ranging from the genuinely altruistic—desire to give back, pay forward, make a positive difference, contribute; to the determinedly self-serving—build a positive public image, enhance or repair reputation, manage or avoid taxes. Some families want to centralize family giving. Others succumb to perceived peer pressure to ‘do good’ with their wealth. Yet others want to assuage guilt for past harms done in blind pursuit of financial profits. Sometimes many of these motives co-exist. Regardless of why families want to formalize their philanthropy, the notion of doing good, facilitating good, funding good, investing in doing good, usually makes those of us in the throes of such activities also feel good. But what if—despite the very best of intentions—the work we fund in the name

of doing good, of philanthropy, actually does substantive harm?

In this essay, we examine just a few of the ways citizens and professionals alike can inadvertently do harm while intending good. We spend a little time embracing philanthropy’s ‘shadow’² in the form of unconscious attitudes of white saviorism. We ask: is philanthropy enacted by family foundations a modern version of rich white people using their privilege to reinforce their own power and superiority, to perpetuate narratives and practices that diminish recipients? As a counterpoint to this prospect of white saviorism, we explore findings from consultations with some of the world’s leading impact innovators, and learn from them some of the steps family foundations can take to amplify the positive impacts of the work they do while proactively minimizing harm.

The Context

The 2020s is an age of increasingly frequent, gargantuan, extreme weather events and environmental jolts: more intense and prolonged droughts—often followed by raging megafires leaving charred landscapes prone to surface runoff, soil erosion and hill-slope failures; annual 500 year floods characterized by walls of murky brown, sludgy water carrying debris, toxins and wildlife (alive and dead); rampant, mutating viruses with unprecedented global death tolls; cumulative inequities as the top 1% of humanity consistently and repeatedly

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gleans 80% of annually generated wealth while the poorest half of humanity gets nothing. Add these realities to precarious work forces fed up by lost opportunities; shrinking lower middle classes; black and brown Americans exhausted and inflamed by baked-in systemic racism and injustices; more and more white males enraged and militant at the prospect of diminished privilege; and we face consequent elevated risks of exacerbated civil unrest and political violence.³

It is not surprising that these escalating, intensifying jolts to our daily lives are being accompanied by unprecedented outpourings of good will, of intentions and actions toward those organizations trying to navigate these challenges in the worst affected communities. Heart-wrenching images portraying the wake of destruction relentlessly bombard our phones, tablets, computers, televisions and print media. Compelling anecdotes, poignant photos and vivid stories of loss and heartache evoke a sense of urgency to help people and communities in need. In some more nefarious scenarios, marketing and PR

folk commandeer the most hellish narratives and glaring images, desperate to fill their organization's coffers while opportunity knocks. As global and local media landscapes blast headlines and soundbites urging us to "Give now," viewers in less distressing predicaments are virtually badgered into donating. And they do. In 2019, charitable giving in the USA alone reached nearly \$500 billion.⁴ Pledges of support sprung from citizens and celebrities at home and across the globe, along with outpourings of corporate support from banks, hospitality, and technology and telecom companies. Few consider the ultimate destination of their dollars, the potential negative impacts, including opportunity costs for financial support to other recipient organizations that may do less harm.

Such headlines and soundbites smooth out and minimize the jagged-edged realities and complexities of doing good, funding good. In this age of unprecedented, instantaneous connectivity, money often pours into charitable organizations who share the most frightful images, regardless of the value or effectiveness of their organization's work. In the aftermath of mass tragic

events, NGOs of every size, nature, and nationality typically flood the scene. Along with the NGOs, record numbers of volunteers flock to disaster zones offering all kinds of goods and services, from hands-on clean-up help to offers of homes to people displaced after their own houses were decimated—again, regardless of the value or effectiveness of what they are offering. Few honestly examine their motives for being there. Few comprehend that their very presence can inadvertently do more harm than good. Well-meaning citizens and professionals alike, even with the most noble intentions, inadvertently doing grave harm while they try to do good.

Philanthropy's Shadow Side

"Unfortunately, there can be no doubt that man is, on the whole, less good than he imagines himself or wants to be. Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is."⁵

Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Jung first coined the term 'shadow'

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to describe those darker parts of our psychosocial self that we choose to ignore, repress, or reject. Jung asserted: “The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge.”⁶ Jung and his disciples encourage ‘shadow work,’ the process of making the unconscious conscious. In doing so, we gain awareness of our unconscious darker behaviors so we might choose whether and how to act in more positive ways. The same might be said for philanthropy and family foundations.

Here, we embrace just one aspect of philanthropy’s shadow side, our tendency to white saviorism. A few years ago, I visited Psychology Beyond Borders (PBB) colleagues in Israel and the Palestinian Territories. On one particularly long day of scheduled meetings, I asked my taxi driver, Uri, to drive me in between meetings all day. He agreed. Over the course of the day, we chatted about our countries, our foods, our families. At 6 feet tall with longish blonde, wavy hair, I was at that time somewhat of an anomaly. The locals seemed curious about this tall stranger in their midst. About 2/3 of the way through that day, neither of us taking a break for food or drinks, Uri stopped the car and ran into a neighborhood deli. He emerged with a triumphant smile on his face, his hands full of long black strands of what turned out to be a unique Israeli style of licorice. Uri presented me a handful of his treasure with a flourish, urging me to try this local delicacy! How could I refuse? As we both munched the delicious treat, Uri said in heavily accented English: “I need to tell you something.” “Okay,” I said cautiously. He then asked: “You know Bowbie?” My response: “Hmm... bowbie? No, what is that?” He said: “You know, the dolls that little girls play with.” “Oh, yes!” I said in recognition. “We call her *Baarbie* in Australia and America.” Uri then declared: “I have to tell you that

you look just like Bowbie!” Little did Uri know I was an outspoken critic of Barbie’s unnatural, disproportionate physical dimensions, her history as a visual object rather than a woman of substance, her role as a harbinger of less than egalitarian values. Not exactly the role model with whom I identified (unless of course, she is Barbie pilot, engineer or President)... Nevertheless, we had a good laugh. And the conversation stayed with me. When I stumbled across *White Savior Barbie* while conducting research for the book, *Impact Imperative*, I was intrigued.⁷ Given the commitment of the organizations with whom I most worked

have the power of financial resources of privilege backing them. Barbie Savior’s messages highlighted perceptions that problems in poor communities, particularly in developing nations, in underserved communities, are easily solvable, especially by visitors who fly in, often without relevant and appropriate knowledge, skills or experience, but with attitudes that suggest they do. Barbie Savior’s bio said it all: “It’s not about me ... but it kind of is.”⁸

Barbie Savior’s self-lacerating satire exposes the dangers of reverence for claims to “alleviate the suffering of the poor,” “give voice to the voiceless,”

Rather than making the world a better place, too often philanthropy reinforces the world as it is.

at the time—Psychology Beyond Borders and Tingari Silverton Foundation—to do good and avoid harm, I reflected on how I and our teams may have perpetrated *White Savior* behaviors without realizing we had.

Barbie Savior began as a joke—a not-so-subtle sideswipe at the mushrooming of “voluntourism” during the 2010s: travel linked to “doing good.” In a cleverly curated photo blog, *Barbie Savior* beamed images and insights of voluntourist Barbie’s “blessed” experiences in Africa in the form of Instagram selfies (cheekily labeled “slumfies”). When introduced, *Barbie Savior* quickly garnered global attention. The two anonymous creators of *Barbie Savior* were frustrated by what they had witnessed in their own international work—mock false callings to duty, dishonest appeals to emotion, invasive and damaging use of images of people in distress—and the viewing of self as uniquely qualified to bring necessary information and change to the global poor. Barbie Savior’s creators’ frustrations stemmed from the “fetishizing and over-sentimentalizing” of experiences by those who are voluntouring, not from the altruistic desire to serve. They especially took issue with unqualified people doing jobs they would never be allowed to do in their own countries or fields if they didn’t

bring “joy to the disadvantaged,” “do everything we can to restore a sense of self-worth in the women we serve.” These are classic good intentions gone awry. *Women* are the agents of restoring their *own* self-worth, a fact that will become increasingly evident through the 2020s, as women assume control of 2/3 of the world’s wealth by 2030. Critics claim these attitudes and acts are just further ways rich people use their privilege to reinforce stereotypes of the “poor,” the “broken,” the “voiceless” or “down-trodden”—perpetuating narratives that diminish recipients while elevating the sense of power and righteousness of the disbursers and their wisdom, money, and resources. It is a different form of colonialism at play, financial imperialism by the wealthy over the “needy,” further vehicles through which the privileged entrench their advantage.⁹

Author Courtney Martin deployed the term “the reductive seduction of other peoples’ problems” to describe our attraction to doing good without conscious deliberation of our own motives.¹⁰ Martin suggests that it is easy for us white privileged westerners to be seduced by the chance to solve *other* people’s problems, especially when they are exotic

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problems in exotic locations garnering global attention. She acknowledges that heeding the calls to do good is “psychologically defensible” and not deliberately malicious. But she does note it is reckless and harmful: that our best intentions can make problems worse for people and the planet. Researcher Ralph Straubhaar, in his analysis of the Do Gooder narrative—in which the hero is usually a well-funded, privileged, Western white person—conveys the message that well-funded, privileged white people have the unique power to uplift, edify and strengthen.¹¹ The Do Gooder narrative perpetuates the belief that solutions come from people in other places and are top-down: often white, male-dominated decision makers in conference or cabinet rooms of organizations located far away. As any Jungian psychotherapist will tell us, it is our darker side, our shadow, that can do the most harm.

Ways Family Foundations Inadvertently Do Harm

For a whole sector intent on doing good, as family foundations, we are largely naïve, or at worst, willfully ignorant, about the harm we can perpetrate with our words and actions. The former president and CEO of the Greater New Orleans Foundation lamented not too long ago: “the collective actions of 90,000+ foundations ... after decades of work ... have failed to alter the most basic conditions of the poor in the US.”¹² In the USA—consistently the most philanthropic of nations—around 50% of dollars donated annually by big givers is distributed to education and healthcare, while only 20% goes to those enduring poverty. Of those education dollars, the biggest donations are typically directed to the elite universities and schools that the wealthy donors themselves attended. Noting these statistics, researchers and authors like the UK’s Paul Valley and Anand Giridharadas contend that rather than making the world a better place, philanthropy largely reinforces the world as it is, with more benefits to the rich than the populations they profess to support.¹³ With virtually all family foundations in the USA codifying the

term “charitable” in their DNA, contemplating the multitude of ways we can unintentionally do harm can be affronting. Yet our Family Foundations can and do perpetrate harm in so many ways, without even realizing we do.

Our Tingari Silverton Foundation and Psychology Beyond Borders teams have partnered with many communities emaciated by disaster: once pristine golden sands of Sri Lanka’s beaches blanketed with smashed trees, boats and other detritus; lush mountainsides of Haiti reduced to mush by earthquake and rain; once musician-crowded, buzzing streets of New Orleans piled high with cars and washed up houses; charred field after charred field across the outback of Australia. Massive outpourings of global and local generosity accompanied these tragedies. Haiti, Sri Lanka, New Orleans and Australia are just a minute selection of a vast number of disaster zones that have been deluged by well-meaning “do-gooders.”¹⁴ In each of these situations, media organizations set up camp for 24-hour non-stop barraging—of commentary, interviews, scenes of horror—drawing momentary attention to the plight of those affected. NGOs and individuals—many with vulture-like determination—swoop into areas of mass tragedy and set up camp with The Answers. When the immediate crisis passes, they often move onto the next. Family foundations often fund organizations caught up in these potentially harmful cycles.

As family foundations we do harm in what and who we fund, the way we fund, when we fund, as well as the way we report what we fund. We do harm when our foundation’s policies, words, and actions diminish the underserved or distressed people and communities we seek to support. For example, when we use labels like “working poor” we reduce to one label all the complexities of the way people in these predicaments live their lives: their extraordinary creativity and resilience in the face of adversity, the richness of their networks and connections, their resourcefulness. As Nobel Prize winner Muhammed Yunus, reminded us: “... poor people are the world’s greatest entrepreneurs. Every day, they must innovate in order to

survive. They remain poor because they do not have the opportunities to turn their creativity into sustainable income ... Everything that is given to the poor makes them poorer. We never have to give. We can accompany the poor in their suffering, but not give them money. One of the blunders that rich countries make with Africa is giving to them; that’s why today they are poorer than before.”¹⁵ How many family foundations use parallel terms like the “working rich” or “non-working wealthy”?

As family foundations, we can contribute to harm when we provide capital to the wrong problems, the wrong solutions. Many well-intended impact initiatives are driven by privileged do-gooders diagnosing what they believe to be “the problem.” These outsider perceptions may be starkly different from local perceptions. We do harm when our foundation teams accept and reward erroneous perceptions of problems and solutions by funding without thorough due diligence about the nature of the challenges and the efficacy of the proposed strategies. We harm by even thinking in simplistic terms like problems and solutions. We contribute to the entrenchment of old harmful ways of doing things if we refuse to fund effectiveness and evaluation research to accompany programs. And when we too make assumptions or buy into recipient organizations’ assumptions about the source and nature of the problems being experienced by the communities we seek to assist, we perpetrate harm. For example, when we fund programs that assume everyone has PTSD after a tragic event, when a majority of humans naturally move through the pain in a few months and only a small proportion go on to have sustained symptoms that interfere with daily functioning.

Our family foundations perpetrate harm when we contribute capital—in all its forms—to initiatives characterized by limited understanding and appreciation of local cultures, customs and ways of doing things. When we support initiatives that disregard the knowledges and tools local communities have already

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tried (what worked or did not work), or duplicate work already effectively provided by local individuals and organizations, we fail at basic human respect. We cause harm if our funding turns people and communities into dependent victims when they daily exhibit their resilience and ingenuity. We harm when we fund well-meaning Western medical teams imposing privileged Western concepts of well-being, giving, aid, and recovery, without considering local customs and local histories of successfully navigating adverse events.

Family foundations also perpetrate harm when we send massive amounts of capital in the immediate wake of a newly salient problem or crisis, without regard for the very long term. Members of our Tingari Silverton Foundation team visited the fledgling republic of East Timor in the early days of their independence from Indonesia, not long after the withdrawal of many global Western NGOs. Locals were scrambling to fill gaps left by departing personnel and resources, leaving businesses without customers, gaps in markets, landscapes trampled, water sources depleted or contaminated. Local communities were simultaneously recovering from years of brutal occupation. Some NGO's were intent on treating survivors for the trauma of virtual slavery to the military elite. What most survivors really wanted were jobs, education for their kids, and sustained access to healthcare. Twenty years on, this young country—with an economy still characterized by subsistence farming and heavily dependent on oil and gas (that may be depleted by 2030)—struggles, long after the departure of most NGOs. Illiteracy, unemployment, access to healthcare and sanitation, security issues and sociopolitical volatility are still prevalent. How did the early influx and then departure of philanthropically funded NGOs positively or negatively impact this long term outcome for East Timor? When we demand short-term results, seeking any quick fix, and neglect the long-term needs of affected populations, we ignore what many effective aid organizations know

too well: ramifications of tragic events can manifest over the long haul, years after media and celebrity attention moves to the next spectacle.

We do harm as family foundations when we fund organizations that mobilize large cadres of volunteers working, eating and sleeping in disaster zones without regard to the additional damage they inflict on local environments. These 'invasions' can deprive local consumers, as food, transport and shelter are devoured by visitors, maybe adding to scarcity and inflation for locals. We harm when we promise resources and skills we don't deliver. Or fund programs that are not appropriate in the local context, like

of discarded materials left by humanitarian aid teams. In Australia, unintended environmental costs while doing good in bushfire zones (like Kangaroo Island) were perpetrated when single-use plastic water bottles and polyester sleeping bags were disbursed to volunteers, then left in local garbage dumping sites. Polyester and plastic constitute two acute threats to clean water, air, food.

Our family foundations do harm when we adhere to our convictions that the initiatives and organizations we fund provide "solutions" that are right, appropriate, the best, and will work, when evidence shows such assumptions to be dubious at best. When we support

Consider how a "Do No Harm" stance fits your mission, consciously avoiding words and actions that diminish the people and communities you seek to support.

communities and charities inundated with discarded clothes and home goods. We perpetrate harm when we use the tragic predicaments of others for marketing, a photo op, adventure, entertainment or political gain. When we use the tragic plight of others to serve our own ends, to make ourselves look good, or feel good. We amplify harm when we post photos, names, and stories on social and traditional media without permission. We do harm when we watch endless coverage of the events (not so different from gladiator watching in ancient Rome), as media invade the space of locals, and when reporters question them at their most vulnerable and depleted capacity to think clearly.

Our foundations especially do harm when we do not take the big picture into account: the larger geopolitical and socioeconomic contexts (local, regional, global). When we do not consider social and environmental impacts of our funding and investing beyond the immediate place and time. Many a local community—upon the departure of swarms of helpers—lament the massive environmental costs of swelling mounds

the selective provision of resources and attention to some groups and not others, we can inadvertently exacerbate family, neighborhood or community rifts, perhaps even changing local socioeconomic and power structures. For example, some studies reveal that microfinance is not as universally beneficial as the dominant narrative suggests. Sometimes, when women are particularly empowered by microloan programs, power structures in families and communities change: some experiencing increased domestic violence as men become disempowered and lose control. Microfinance initiatives that research and counter negative impacts are the ones we should be supporting.

We inadvertently do harm when we fall into stereotype traps. For example, two teenage boys of color start a bushfire: are they young deviants seeking attention, bioterrorists, or pawns, symbolic of systemic ills: metaphorical lightning rods of cultures colliding? And sometimes we harm when we allow ideology or the promise of

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our own gains (reputation, networks, prestige) to trump scientific evidence about those problems and how to alleviate them. Debating the source of climate change at this point is ridiculous. Just ask Qantas, Shell, or the Secretary of any of the armed forces about their scenarios for 2030. I bet they include escalating extreme weather events; massive chasms between the wealthiest and poorest people on our planet; outbreaks of conflict over limited resources (especially water); and shifts in geopolitical power balances from West to East. I also bet they are planning for these realities, not debating their genesis. So we contribute to harm when we fail to fund initiatives designed to prevent and prepare for predictable calamities, like budgeting for personnel and up-to-date equipment to prevent paralysis and damage when the inevitable extreme freeze hits, as it did across Texas earlier this year.

Challenges in these contexts are often complex and systemic in nature, and embedded in wider local, community and even national or global geopolitical ecosystems. The capacity for any single foundation or volunteer to alleviate poverty, provide support for vulnerable children, or change systems is limited. Similarly, “helicopter” style NGOs, other than those who partner with locals in offering evidence-based, first responder, psychological first aid or similar kinds of support in the immediate aftermath, can do little as “visitors” over the long haul. To substantively impact the systemic roots of complex local, regional or even global challenges, we must fund strategies that know their place in a suite of multidisciplinary and multi-levelled initiatives, with locals in the driver’s seat. Such initiatives must be characterized by collaborations *with* locals and build on and contribute to growing local skills and knowledges over the very long term. When we fund fly-in-fly-out visitors, devoid of meaningful collaborations with locals in drivers’ seats, we do harm.

As family foundations, we harm every single time we fund an initiative or organization that perpetrates any or

all of these forms of harm. We defy our own end objectives in doing good every single time we blindly give, without considering how our involvement might harm someone, somewhere, sometime.

How Family Foundations Can Do Good While Proactively Minimizing Harm

So how do we avoid doing harm? How do we channel our altruism in ways that genuinely foster positive impacts while minimizing harm? Our research team (a collaboration of the Tingari Silverton Foundation and the Institute For The Future) asked those questions of some 130 leading innovators, entrepreneurs, investors and other positive impactors around the world. Our research revealed that family foundations can contribute to the greater good while minimizing harm when we:

- Clearly define what the Foundation hopes to achieve with our good intentions and actions. Foundations can learn a lot about their motives and priorities by spend time defining the Foundation mission and specific purposes. Consider how a “Do No Harm” stance fits the mission, consciously avoiding words and actions that diminish the people and communities the Foundation seeks to support.
- Overtly examine and discuss the dark side of philanthropy, and of our own foundations. Explore our own motives for ‘giving’—the good, the bad and the ugly. There is nothing wrong with doing philanthropy to manage taxes, so long as we understand and mitigate the negative impacts of disbursing the dollars to the destinations we select.
- Commit to comprehensively and rigorously research how our Foundation might be doing harm to someone, somewhere, sometime without even knowing it. Systematically and rigorously assess the nature and scope of our own impacts (positive *and* negative) in a particular context and in wider contexts, in the short and long term.
- Design and enact governance architecture that embeds Do No Harm to all stakeholders.
- Design and enact a *Do No Harm Policy* as part of the Foundation’s suite of policies. What does doing no harm mean in your foundation’s local and wider context? Consider requiring a “Harm Assessment” when screening organizations to fund. At the very least, ask potential recipients of capital the question: How might these activities cause unintended harm? What are the potential negative impacts of this work, anywhere in the ecosystem?
- Design and enact Foundation *Investment and Disbursement Policies* that synchronize with the *Do No Harm Policy*. When making investments, distributions, partnerships, ask: Does this disbursement of capital do harm anywhere in the local or global ecosystems? Sincerely and honestly assess the nature and scope of the likely impacts (positive *and* negative) of the gifting or investment; in the particular local contexts and in wider contexts, in the short and long term.
- Consider capital in all its forms: financial, intellectual, reputational, mentoring, relationships, network, etc. In contributing any form of your Foundation’s capital to a recipient organization, ask: What are the intended impacts? The unintended impacts?
- Conduct your own *Harm Risk Assessments* for each potential investment or disbursement. If the Foundation does so, equally consider constructively sharing the findings of these assessments with the recipient organization, and collaboratively brainstorm the potential strategies for countering the negative impacts. This can be a helpful form of intellectual capital that helps recipient organizations think in terms of ecosystems and wider impacts.
- Comprehensively define success beyond the dominant financial paradigm. Success may be the value added by the other forms of capital, for example, intellectual or relationships/network capital. Success may be mitigating potential harms before they occur.
- Support or enact organizations and initiatives that proactively partner with

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locals to build local capacities and amplify collaborations, rather than organizations who helicopter in with their own preconceptions and potentially inappropriate ways of doing things—preconceptions and ways that can negatively interfere in local power balances. Encode these practices into Foundation policies.

- Affirm and fund initiatives that place locals in the drivers' seats. Considered and evidence-informed responses to 'need' are best enacted by local organizations who are resourced (with skills, knowledges, networks, funding and other materials) to not only do the immediate job, but to build local capacity for the long term. Locally led, effective, sustainable, local organizations with long-term, deep roots in the affected community have the best change of long term success. Australia's *Children's Ground* is a powerful example of a collaborative partnership between local communities, governments and funders: locally led, all of community collaboration with long-term horizons. *Children's Ground* was established for long term (generational), systemic positive impact.
- Proactively and systematically play devil's advocate. Repeatedly ask and monitor: Is that the best, most positively impactful way to contribute? Can this initiative do harm to people, to the planet? Is what our Foundation doing, the organizations we are supporting, inadvertently causing harm to anyone, anywhere, anytime, no matter how far into the future? If our 'for purpose' actions are indeed inadvertently causing harm, what are we also doing to avoid or minimize such harm?
- Ask potential recipient organizations to answer those same questions.¹⁶

In my birth country Australia, it is no surprise that one of the world's oldest living cultures, the original custodians of our ancient land, has some answers to humanity's current predicament, to our futures as living beings on planet earth; to our present custodianship of the

precious resources upon which we rely to live. Many innovators, entrepreneurs and investors leading the impact landscape without doing harm, simultaneously think like ancient Aboriginal Australians and modern futurists. For ancient Aboriginal Australians, the past, present and future all converge in the ever-present now. In Aboriginal understandings of time, our actions in the now are a product of all the ancestors who've come before us, and all the descendants who emerge ahead of us. What we do in the now affects all of us everywhere and "everywhen." What we do in the here and now affects us for all time: the land, the water, the air we breathe, all living things. Futurists invite us to think forward to horizons far ahead. Futurists invite knowing that multiple different futures await us, and multiple paths to those futures can be orchestrated or written by us.

If family foundations want to combine charitable intent to do good with the goal of maximizing positive impacts while minimizing negative, a good start is in understanding that what we do on this day, in this moment, inevitably impacts someone, somewhere, sometime. Even if in the far distant future or on some remote part of the planet, the solar system or the universe. Family foundations, like leading positive impactors around the world, can contribute to the greater good when they attend to the *how*, not just the end results of impacting. Leading positive impactors think in verbs. In actions. They think about their contribution as process, not just outcomes. Rather than think linearly—where a sequence of actions leads to outcomes—exemplary impactors think in circles, about relationships. They think: what goes around comes around. And they practice humility, placing locals at the center of any stories, not themselves or their own contribution. Instead, local men and women from diverse knowledges and skillsets, not privileged "Barbies" and "Kens." Instead, locals in the drivers' seats, working together for the greater good of their communities.

When I am asked: "What does philanthropy without doing harm look like?" I run through a checklist in my mind: Philanthropy intent on no harm is "self-aware, reflective, considered,

informed, evidence-based, embedded in context, collaborative, locally led, long term, proactively anti-harm." If family foundations want to be truly charitable, philanthropy without harm genuinely and authentically places the greater good of the peoples and communities in need far above any serving of self.

Endnotes

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3. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/04/06/capitol-insurrection-arrests-cpost-analysis/>
4. <https://givingusa.org/giving-usa-2020-charitable-giving-showed-solid-growth-climbing-to-449-64-billion-in-2019-one-of-the-highest-years-for-giving-on-record/>
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10. <http://newafricanmagazine.com/inside-white-saviour-industrial-complex/>
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13. Paul Valley, 2020. *Philanthropy – from Aristotle to Zuckerberg*. Bloomsbury. UK.
14. <https://disasterphilanthropy.org/our-approach/disasters/>
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16. These themes are explored in much more detail in Ryan, P. *Impact Imperative: Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Investing to Transform the Future*. 2019. Greenleaf. USA. ■