



DONORS GATHER IN SAN FRAN

NATIONAL SUMMIT ON FAMILY PHILANTHROPY // FEBRUARY 20-21, 2017 // SAN FRANCISCO

By Michael Moody, Ph.D.

The passions and goals of donors matter a lot in philanthropy, especially family philanthropy. Donor interests not only motivate giving, but often direct where much of that giving goes — which causes, organizations, and strategies get the support they need.

But what we often call “donor intent” is not the only determining factor for the giving we all rely on to help solve social problems and advance the public good. Giving is — and should be — also driven by what communities or beneficiaries need, by evidence about which strategies can have the most impact, and by input from grantee partners who know best what they need to succeed.

How can family donors walk this line? How can they pursue their vision and mission — even honor a long-standing family legacy — while also meeting evolving public needs and engaging closely with partners doing the work on the ground? How can families have both donor intent and real impact?

In late February, 150 family donors and others from around the country gathered in San Francisco for two days of intensive dialogue on these questions. The participants in the National Summit on Family Philanthropy dove deep into this perennial challenge in philanthropy, with the help of experienced and innovative donors and thought leaders who lead the plenary and breakout discussions.

This was the fourth biennial offering of the National Summit, which is a centerpiece of the Frey Foundation Chair for Family Philanthropy program at the Johnson Center.

The San Francisco Bay-area was a fascinating location for this dialogue, as it is home to one of America’s oldest philanthropic cities and the heart of a region on the cutting edge of dramatic changes in family philanthropy today. The Summit conversation often engaged novel and instructive examples from Silicon Valley or elsewhere in the region — examples of disruptive and entrepreneurial donor strategies, and of close and transparent collaboration between donors and grassroots organizations. But there were plenty of examples of entrepreneurial family giving from around the country, including some of the nation’s oldest philanthropic families who are finding creative ways to advance their long legacies by adapting to today’s circumstances.

Summit attendees, including many who have attending several past Summits, said afterward that they came away with ideas and lessons that will help them improve their own giving and help them find the right mix of intent and impact in their family. But the benefits of the Summit transcend those felt by the people in the room for those two days. The Summit is just the starting point for upcoming national resources and thought leadership by the Johnson Center on this enduring challenge for our field. Look for the reports, essays, webinars, and other materials to be released over the course of the next year.

Our deep thanks to the National Summit sponsors and advisory committee, as well as all the staff involved in making the event a success. Your hard work is paying off for family donors around the country.