

# In-conversation with Stanford PACS: the future of philanthropy

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By Perpetual Private Insights

11 August 2020

Recently Perpetual's Cat Fay and Jane Magor were joined by two of Stanford's Center of Philanthropy and Civil Society (PACS)' brightest minds for a conversation about the future of philanthropy.

Rob Reich and Lucy Bernholz are familiar to many local philanthropists and NFPs through a series of events they've featured in as part of Perpetual's ongoing partnership with Stanford PACS.

The *Future of Philanthropy* discussion looked at some of the big philanthropy issues playing out in the US and Australia. Philanthropic responses to the pandemic featured in the conversation – but it ranged across wider and deeper issues. You can watch the recording of this conversation above.

We've pulled out some of the conversation highlights below.

## **“Trust me, I'm from the philanthropic foundation”**

Stanford PACS's Lucy Bernholz hailed “an extraordinary response” by philanthropists in the US as the pandemic unfolded there. In her view civil society, exemplified by informal giving and resource sharing within and between communities, really stepped up in the health crisis.

Institutional philanthropy, the big foundations, also did their part, mobilising massive amounts of money and getting it out into the community.

Rob Reich, as he often does, put this good news story under a different microscope, asking whether it is really the role of philanthropy to deliver services that other nations fund via taxation. He cautioned the philanthropic community about approving a narrative where they always step up in a crisis – especially as a global recession unfolds and debt-loaded governments look to other arms of society to fund essential services.

“We have to be wary of a certain dynamic...” says Rob, “a dependency on the wealthy to provide the most basic and essential services that we should have as a simple entitlement of being a citizen.”

You can learn more about how US philanthropists reacted to the pandemic – and the debates that’s thrown up – in these two Rob Reich articles.

- [What Big Philanthropy Can Learn From the Citizen Networks Helping Us Survive Today's Crises](#)
- [The Dangers of Relying on Philanthropists During Pandemics](#)

### **Australia through fire and pestilence**

Perpetual’s Jane Magor discussed how the double-blow of bushfires and pandemic has reshaped the thinking of many families as they worked through their giving plans.

Forced to respond to rapidly evolving disasters, many Australian philanthropists are making their donations at arms-length, providing flexibility through unrestricted grants and trusting well governed organisations in the communities and on the front line to make the right decisions.

According to Jane, her philanthropy clients and the NFPs she works with are already adapting their giving and their program development to help society deal with the pandemic’s effects – and after-effects.

### **The internet is not a communication device. It's life blood.**

Lucy Bernholz has a deep interest and expertise in digital civil society. She says the pandemic has surfaced what was hidden in plain sight for years... “stop thinking about the internet as a communication mechanism. It is an on/off switch for every part of our economy and every part of our society.”

Lucy says this has important implications for philanthropists and for democracy. Population lockdowns around the world mean that if you don’t have the internet you can’t get educated, you can’t access healthcare and you can’t interact with your elected representatives.

That raises a whole raft of questions about who owns, controls and has access to internet technologies – the access infrastructure that is now as important as roads and water pipes.

## Want to see more and learn more?

The above snippets are just an entrée. During the one-hour discussion, the team from Stanford PACS and Perpetual ranged across other issues including:

- Are the economic effects of the pandemic hitting donations?
- How civil society is being changed by the emergence of a 'different tradition of care'. Mutual aid networks and crowdfunding are changing the way in which money is raised, services provided and causes funded. This has implications in terms of power relationships, the disaggregation of giving and much more.
- The continuing importance of philanthropy acting as long-term capital that can be put to work finding innovative solutions to social problems.

To get more involved, you could join the research and knowledge sharing networks supported by the Stanford PACS team:

- The [Digital Assembly Research Network](#) (DARN, #DigitalAssembly), is a global community of people whose work addresses the ways digital systems influence our ability and right to assemble. We welcome scholars, technologists, advocates, and policy makers to the conversation and hope that new connections will spark new ideas and actions.
- [Digital Impact](#) helps social sector practitioners use digital resources safely, equitably and effectively. It's an [online community](#) dedicated to the exchange of practical data-related knowledge and expertise; hosts in-person and [virtual conversations](#) that support knowledge sharing, ideation, research, and cross-sector collaboration; and develops ready-to-use [tools, policies, and resources](#) for data governance in the social sector.

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