

MODERN PHILAN THROPY

How MCF is innovating to serve a new generation of philanthropists





Safia Kryger-Nelson,
Director of Philanthropic Planning

Philanthropy cannot solve the magnitude of the medical and economic problems created by COVID-19. But it can make a heck of a dent, and Bay Area foundations and philanthropists have stepped up to the plate during this time to contribute in a big way.

Take the Marin Community Foundation (MCF), for example. In the first month of the pandemic, MCF was able to distribute over \$12 million to key community organizations, thanks in greatest measure to the generosity of its donors, along with other Bay Area residents, businesses, and community groups.

In addition, MCF partnered with a longtime donor and entrepreneur to import 100,000 N-95, FDA-approved masks, which were then distributed to hospitals, community clinics, and senior homes. And it has partnered with the State of California and other foundations in the creation of the California Immigrant Resilience Fund, which will provide urgently needed support to more than 2 million undocumented Californians who cannot access federal relief, yet who play an essential role in our economy and in our community.

"The spirit with which folks have embraced this challenge is inspiring," says MCF's president and CEO, Dr. Tom Peters. "Our donors have shown just what kind of impact philanthropy can make in a moment like this."

Take the Bay Area's Louise Kelso Goodwin. Her parents were both ardent philanthropists, and now after their passing, she is trying to continue their mission. To date she has followed the strategic guidelines that they had set for distributing their fund. However, in an act that now seems prophetic, they had included a clause that stated that if there was an unprecedented event or disaster that could be alleviated by a significant contribution, that the fund should be leveraged. "I wanted to make the biggest immediate impact I could during these unprecedented times and help the underserved in our community," says Kelso Goodwin. "I wanted to focus on what I could do to address the immediate needs of folks impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. With MCF's help, I selected nonprofits that I felt would be able to activate financial support quickly and efficiently in the areas of food distribution, health care, and general emergency support." The foundation was able to distribute \$4.5 million from the Kelso fund to 13 community nonprofits within a few days—a truly game-changing amount for many of the organizations. "I feel very honored and lucky to be in a position to do this," says Kelso Goodwin. "Being able to change people's lives is a very satisfying feeling, and knowing that this money will make such an impact has shifted my perspective. I truly appreciate all the wonderful work of so many dedicated people."

During the pandemic, the field of philanthropy has never been more necessary or more dynamic. Fortunately, MCF knows how to do dynamic. In recent years, its donors have skewed younger and have begun asking different questions about issues and impact. They wanted fresh ideas and approaches to old problems. They were asking to involve their families in ways they hadn't done before. They were seeking a thought partner to collaborate on strategic options. Many of them, particularly those with significant resources, wanted—and expected—to have their philanthropic assets managed through their own wealth advisory team.

In recognition of these movements, MCF embraced a path of innovation. "The team came to me and said, 'There's a shift,'" says Peters. "They saw opportunity to develop new offerings, forge unconventional partnerships, and appeal to a new generation of philanthropists. I told them to go for it!"

MCF's first new offering, Virtuoso, was developed as a modern alternative to a private foundation. Established for funds of \$5 million and greater, it is designed to provide the ultimate in flexibility and customization for those donors with a profound commitment to charitable giving.

Virtuoso donors are served by MCF's Family Office of Philanthropy, headed by Senior Director Megan DeGraeve. "The Family Office



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Megan DeGraeve, Senior Director
Family Office of Philanthropy



PHOTO BY HILLARY JEANNE

Philip Feldman, Senior Partner
Family Wealth Group

provides a team-oriented approach that surrounds donors with all the expertise they require, and then creates deep partnerships with their wealth management teams: estate planning attorneys, CPAs, financial advisors, and the like,” DeGraeve says. “We work seamlessly together, all to serve the best interests of the donor.”

“We design a structure for their giving that makes most sense for their personal needs,” she continues. “Some like the formal nature of an advisory board; others want the flexibility of a donor-advised fund. We have a variety of curricula that they can become engaged with, particularly in the area of strategic philanthropy. Additionally, many of our donors want to introduce their children to the concept of charitable giving and to teach them about the value of money, so we have developed a number of really engaging resources to help them do so.”

“We have referred many clients of various levels of wealth to establish donor-advised funds at MCF,” says Philip Feldman, Senior Partner of the Family Wealth Group at San Francisco-based Coblenz Patch Duffy & Bass LLP. “Their services and offerings are unparalleled, the staff and leadership is incredibly responsive, helpful, pleasant, and knowledgeable. They have two programs that I find particularly valuable and unique: Virtuoso, which replicates a family private foundation without the many negative requirements and restrictions; and the Venture Impact Program that supports a donor advised fund in investing in high-impact private companies.”

The Venture Impact Program, also catchily known as VIP, “is essentially a way to enable impact investing through grantmaking,” says Safia Kryger-Nelson, Director of Philanthropic Planning at MCF. “Donors can identify a for-profit business that is at an early stage of development, and if it has a social or environmental mission, there is the potential to use philanthropic resources to provide critical seed capital.” To run VIP, MCF relies on its partnership with ImpactAssets, a market leader in

impact investing with a global reach.

On the heels of VIP came MCF’s latest new offering: The Lens.

“Again, this idea emerged following conversations we had with a number of our donors—particularly females—indicating that they wanted to do more for girls and women,” says Kryger-Nelson. “More than simply support organizations that are focused on that population, donors were seeking ways to empower women and girls in all of their giving.”

The Lens is a tool that allows donors and their philanthropic advisors to examine gender gaps and gender disparities at any organization and then use the learnings to better direct their charitable support. “MCF donors will be able to examine nonprofits in a new way—assess programs, policies, organizational cultures, leadership roles and more—both to uncover gender disparities and to forge specific outcomes for women,” says Kryger-Nelson.

“What’s even cooler about this product, is that we’re able to extend it into our VIP program,” she adds. “This means that donors can make investments that provide women with access to capital, support women entrepreneurs, and build products and services that have a positive impact on women and girls, anywhere in the world.”

While excited about where MCF is now and where it’s going next, the 33-year-old foundation’s leaders take great pride in its past as well. “One of our proudest accomplishments was the introduction of our nondiscrimination policy,” says Peters. “In 2005, MCF took a lead role in the country by instituting a nondiscrimination policy as an essential component of its due diligence process in both advised and discretionary grantmaking. Before a grant is made, each grantee is asked to attest that the agency does not discriminate against anyone on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age, medical condition, veteran status, economic status, marital status, disability, ancestry,



Louise Kelso Goodwin,
MCF Donor

sexual orientation, or gender identity/expression. In this way, our donors can be assured that grants made on their behalf are in complete alignment with their and MCF’s bedrock values, particularly those concerning equity and inclusiveness.”

Two years ago, MCF opened a San Francisco office to complement its Marin headquarters, in recognition that its donor base was expanding throughout the Bay Area. “The concept of ‘community’ reflects a variety of affiliations beyond just local geography,” Peters states. “Our donors have a national and even global perspective, often focused on tackling problems that don’t always have clear physical boundaries to them. They want to partner with whoever can help them make the greatest impact. And that is what we will always strive to do.” ●

—For more information about MCF and to discuss your philanthropy, please contact Linda Sweeney at 415.464.2507 or lsweeney@marincf.org.