

The Giving Autobiography and The Four Traditions A Civic Reflection Guide

❖ Advance directions to participants:

The Autobiography:

In advance of the meeting, ask participants to take 30 minutes to create their “Giving Autobiography” (attached) and bring it with them. Emphasize that this document will not be handed in. It is for the autobiographer’s own use and reflection.

Reading:

Also ask participants to read “Four Traditions of Philanthropy” by Elizabeth Lynn and Susan Wisely.

❖ For Starters (15 minutes):

Ask participants to talk in pairs for five minutes about a good gift they have received and the qualities that made it good. Then reconvene the large group and invite (never force) people to share some of the qualities of the gifts they identified. Make a list of these qualities on a flipchart. Refer back to the list as you go through the four traditions of philanthropy, noting when a tradition is particularly conducive—or hostile—to certain qualities of good giving.

❖ The Four Traditions Discussion (60 minutes):

Distribute the chart and lead the group through a review and discussion of each of the “four traditions” of American philanthropy in the Lynn and Wisely article. You may find the attached “tradition profiles” helpful as an outline to follow in reviewing each tradition.

One way to help people grasp the distinctions among the four traditions is by using the following analogy as you introduce each tradition in turn:

Relief: Give a person a fish, feed her for a day.

Improvement: Teach a person to fish, feed her for a lifetime.

Social Reform: In order to fish, people need equal access to the pond, unpolluted waters, and resources with which to buy fishing poles.

Civic Engagement: Has anyone ever asked this person if she likes fish?

As you move through the traditions, we recommend pausing after a brief overview of each and inviting discussion. Questions might include:

Can you identify any examples of this tradition from your own experience?

What are some of the strengths of this tradition, in your view?

What are some of the weaknesses of this tradition?

At the end of this segment, invite the group to discuss whether these four traditions adequately describe the landscape of giving. You might ask:

*What is missing from this description of different traditions of philanthropy, if anything?
Is there another tradition not described?*

Is “civic engagement” a philanthropic tradition like the other three? Or is it a means to the ends of the other three?

❖ **Wrap up (15 minutes)**

In closing, invite participants to return to their timelines and look for overall patterns of participation in the four traditions.

Are there times in your life when one tradition has dominated? Is any tradition absent?

Do you get asked to support one tradition more than others?

In thinking about your future giving, which tradition most appeals to you?

Would you prefer to support a single tradition or to spread your giving across the traditions?

Reflections here could be shared depending on the size and closeness of the group. You could provide a sheet with these questions, ask people to write for themselves for 5 minutes, and then invite comments. Again, take care not to pressure anyone into discussing their responses to your questions.

Four Traditions of American Philanthropy

Based on
"Four Traditions of Philanthropy"
by Lynn & Wisely

Philanthropy as Relief

*

Operates on
Principle of
Compassion

*

alleviates
human suffering

Philanthropy as Improvement

*

Operates on
Principle of
Progress

*

maximizes
human potential

Philanthropy as Social Reform

*

Operates on
Principle of
Justice

*

solves
social problems

Philanthropy as Civic Engagement

*

Operates on
Principle of
Participation

*

builds
community

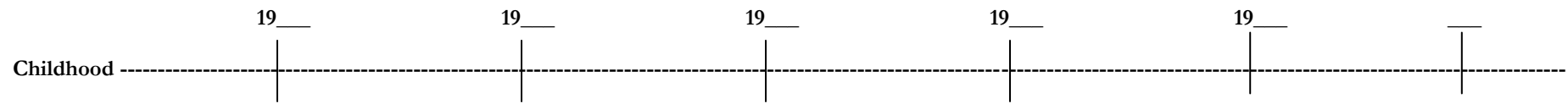
My Giving Autobiography

Steps in Developing Your Autobiography

1. Demarcate the attached timeline in five or ten year intervals, i.e., 1930, 1935, 1940 ... or 1950, 1960, 1970, as appropriate for you.
2. Think about key life history events in your life from childhood to the present: for example, schooling, graduation, jobs, religious changes, marriage, significant friendships, etc. Note these significant life events *above the timeline*.
3. Now, think back to the first really good gift you remember receiving. Note this gift *just under the timeline* near the corresponding date, with a phrase that describes the gift: “my first bike,” “a stranger gave me bus fare,” etc. What made that gift memorable? Note that too.
4. Continue along the timeline noting key gifts you have received and some qualities that made those gifts memorable.
5. Now think back to the first time you remember either giving to or serving others. (If you have difficulty remembering, it might help you to think of the first time you remember voluntarily doing something for someone outside of your family or the first gifts of money you gave.) Place this memory on the *bottom portion of the timeline* near the corresponding date, with a phrase that describes what you did, i.e., “contributed to the offering plate,” “sorted clothes at the shelter,” “sold Girl Scout cookies,” “contributed to United Way,” “collected petition signatures,” etc.
6. Continue working on the bottom of the timeline and record significant activities of giving and serving from your first recollection to the present time.

My Giving Autobiography

Life
History
Events



Gifts Received

Gifts Given
and
Acts of Service

My Giving Autobiography, continued

Life
History
Events



Gifts Received

Gifts Given
and
Acts of Service

TRADITION OF RELIEF

Key Features:

- Animated by compassion
- Concerned with alleviating suffering
- Expresses *caritas*, or other-regarding love, for others as part of God's creation

Exemplary Expressions:

Give a man a fish, feed him for a day.

Anon

During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance." His disciples answered, "But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?" "How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asked. "Seven," they replied. He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. When he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people, and they did so. They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them. The people ate and were satisfied.

Mark 8: 1-8

Standard: Have I eased someone's suffering? Is there less pain in this world than when I began?

Examples:

- Shelters
- Soup Kitchens
- Disaster Relief

Strengths:

- Allows us to express love or empathy for others, without regard for status or merit
- Highlights personal obligation to respond to others
- Responds to clear and pressing needs

Weaknesses:

- Can waste precious resources by failing to address the causes of suffering
- Accepts social inequities as inevitable

TRADITION OF IMPROVEMENT

Key Features:

- Animated by desire to maximize human potential
- Provides opportunities for self-improvement
- Often inspired by personal experience—a chance to give as we have been given to.

Exemplary Expressions:

Teach a man to fish, feed him for a lifetime.

Anon.

In bestowing charity, the main consideration should be to help those who will help themselves; to provide part of the means by which those who desire to improve may do so; to give those who desire to rise the aids by which they may rise; to assist, but rarely or never to do all. Neither the individual nor the race is improved by almsgiving. . . . [T]he best means of benefiting the community is to place within its reach the ladders upon which the aspiring can rise--parks, and means of recreation, by which men are helped in body and mind; works of art, certain to give pleasure and improve the public taste, and public institutions of various kinds, which will improve the general condition of the people.

Andrew Carnegie "Wealth" (1889)

Standard: Have I given other individuals opportunities to fulfill their potential, especially the kinds of opportunities I have had?

Examples:

- Carnegie Libraries
- Fellowships
- Drug and Alcohol Treatment Programs

Strengths:

- Allows us to express gratitude for help received
- Emphasizes individual agency, responsibility

Weaknesses:

- Benefits those who are already well-situated, highly motivated
- Underestimates power of social, legal, economic barriers to success

TRADITION OF REFORM

Key Features:

- Focuses on structural conditions that shape human destiny
- Seeks to equalize those conditions in order to create a more just society
- Attempts to solve public problems, often through experimentation and advocacy
- Dominates mindset of many large foundations

Exemplary Expressions:

A Catalyst for Change.

MacArthur Foundation slogan

[V]irtually everything I have done as [Carnegie Corporation's] president...has been guided by a single motivating force--a lifelong belief in social justice and the equality of all people under the law. ... The key questions for me here with respect to any proposed action have always been: Will it promote equality of opportunity? And will it to some degree make the world a fairer and more just place? ... I should say that I am simply subscribing to Andrew Carnegie's belief in a broadly available educational system as the essential foundation for a democratic society, although the issue in my time has been one of increasing access to education by overcoming barriers of discrimination and poverty, whereas in his it was promoting an understanding of education's value.

Alan Pfifer, Carnegie Corporation Annual Report, 1981

Standard: Is our society fairer, more equal, or more just as a result of my activities?

Examples:

- War on Poverty
- Advocacy groups for domestic violence legislation
- Think tanks and research institutes focusing on public policy issues

Strengths:

- Acknowledges power of societal circumstances and seeks to change them
- Intentionally experiments with alternative responses to these problems

Weaknesses:

- Can overlook possibilities for near-term goods in the pursuit of large system change
- Can be directive, even arrogant, in advocating for social change on behalf of the public

TRADITION OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Key Features:

- Concerned with nurturing relationships and responsibility through civic involvement
- Values untapped wisdom of cultural/religious traditions and practical experience
- Seeks to help citizens tap this wisdom through opportunities for public deliberation and public service

Exemplary Expressions:

Only connect.

E.M. Forster

'To love mercy' and at the same time 'to do justly' is the difficult task; to fulfill the first requirement alone is to fall into the error of indiscriminate giving with all its disastrous results; to fulfill the second solely is to obtain the stern policy of withholding, and it results in such a dreary lack of sympathy and understanding that the establishment of justice is impossible. It may be that the combination of the two can never be attained save as we fulfill the third requirement—'to walk humbly with God,' which may mean to walk for many dreary miles beside the lowliest of His creatures. ...

Jane Addams, Democracy and Social Ethics, 1902

Standard: Have we built relationships among citizens in our communities so that they can better understand and assist one another?

Examples:

- Study Circles
- Neighborhood Associations
- Town meetings on social issues

Strengths:

- Provides vehicles for expression and transmission of civic values
- Empowers people who might not otherwise participate in public life
- Encourages attention to local needs and calls up local assets

Weaknesses:

- Results in more talk than action
- Difficult to assess “outcomes” and therefore may be too slow and frustrating to sustain philanthropic interest