



APC Messaging Playbook

Purpose of this playbook

The starting point for the APC Messaging Playbook was that APC aspires for each and every one of our members to be an ambassador for philanthropy and for our circle in your own countries and wider communities. This playbook is intended to serve as a reference guide for APC members when they make speeches, talk about philanthropy and engage with the wider ecosystem amongst peers and other stakeholders. It also ensures that APC presents a coherent message and has a common perspective when APC speaks on panels, writes op-eds, brings on external consultants, etc.

In the following pages is an overview of APC as well as key themes about philanthropy. These themes are high-level observations and trends which you have likely seen for yourself through your own giving as well. They can be highlighted and adapted as relevant to the situation.

If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to us.

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Overview of APC

Asia Philanthropy Circle is a membership-based platform for philanthropists to learn, connect, and collaborate towards advancing a better Asia.

Founded in 2015 by philanthropists for philanthropists, APC's mission is to accelerate private action for the public good by addressing systemic challenges through collaborative philanthropy.

APC is a registered charity headquartered in Singapore.

Diversity of membership

- With 55 members from 13 markets (as of 9 May 2022), representing over US\$100B of combined family wealth, APC is home to a diverse network of philanthropists across Asia—across generations and interests, with a shared vision of what philanthropy means to them.
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Value of APC to members

- APC enables members to improve their practice of philanthropy by providing opportunities to learn, connect, and collaborate.
 - APC helps members take action by supporting learning, sharing new opportunities and best practices, and facilitating connections with peers, experts, and best-in-class implementing organisations.
 - APC addresses complex issues at a systems level by catalysing and co-creating collaborations in many forms amongst its members.
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Value of APC to the ecosystem

- APC helps strengthen the wider philanthropic ecosystem in Asia by convening philanthropists across the region, encouraging members to engage actively in the ecosystem, and providing thought leadership and useful resources that address key issues in the sector.

Theme 1: The Role of Philanthropy

Philanthropy is more than just giving money—it is the strategic application of giving, along with a commitment of time and other resources, to address social and environmental problems that are otherwise overlooked.

Context

- Philanthropy cannot solve the problem on its own. The actual magnitude of philanthropy is small compared to the scale of these problems or even government funding for these issues.
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Key points

- The strategic value of philanthropy requires you to take a long-term perspective and fully explore and address the root causes of a problem and systems-wide issues.
- Philanthropy can play a unique role in its approach to supporting change. This can include:
 - taking risks and being entrepreneurial by co-creating new ideas and demonstrating proof of concept of pilots;
 - dedicating resources or supporting advocacy efforts to draw attention to less popular causes or interventions;
 - incentivising collaboration and taking swift action, as it is more nimble than other types of capital or government bureaucracies.
- In wider collaboration, philanthropy can serve as a neutral platform to bring together different stakeholders, including businesses and the private sector, non-profit organisations and government.
- As philanthropists, we engage with the head, heart and hands. The head and hands are necessary to craft strategies and execute those strategies. But it is the heart and those personal connections and inspirational aspirations that give us the dedication and commitment to continue working on these complex social problems.

Theme 2: Philanthropy in Asia

Philanthropy in Asia differs in the way it is practiced in the West—and that distinction is not positive or negative, but rather a result of the local context and environment. Even though Asia’s philanthropy landscape is less developed, there are many noteworthy successes.

Context

- Giving in Asia has an extremely long tradition, but the institutionalisation of that giving as philanthropy is a more recent and still emerging trend. Religious giving continues to be common, as well as giving tied to family businesses.
 - Governments in Asia view the role of civil society differently from the West. The term “civil society” is rarely used in Asia. There is pressure on the social sector to act in alignment with government rather than to serve as a check on government. This, along with the underdeveloped NGO sector, has contributed to an overall trust deficit within the social sector.
 - Due to the nascent local NGO sector, Asian philanthropists often operate their own programmes to maintain control and oversight over their philanthropic activities.
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Key points

- Philanthropists often work close to the ground and actively know the organisations and initiatives that they support. These community partnerships allow for more co-creation and less bureaucracy and power imbalances than seen in the West. Despite this, there continues to be a general lack of trust in the wider social sector, in part due to limited practices around transparency and accountability.
 - There are many cost-effective solutions in Asia because of the need to do a lot with very little. Innovations can also borrow ideas and leapfrog existing practices in the West. (Note: this is not necessarily true for Singapore or other more developed countries, where initiatives can be quite costly).
 - It is important to anchor with local and regional perspectives and shift away from the inclination for Western organisations to lead, although of course it is important to learn from external models and sometimes import them with the necessary adaptation.
 - Asia has a nascent local NGO sector and many grassroots, community-level organisations lack the staff or capacity to grow their operations to expand their work. Rather than demanding that every dollar go directly to programme activities, philanthropists can support local NGOs in scaling their activities and impact by building up their capacity, professional staff and governance systems. Philanthropists can further contribute by supporting intermediaries and the ecosystem infrastructure.
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Theme 3: The Importance of Collaboration

Collaboration—between philanthropists as well as with other stakeholders in the sector—is key to making efficient, lasting and scaled impact. Don’t reinvent the wheel.

Context

- Collaboration is not a natural or easy process; it can be difficult to align views or give up control.
 - Collaboration can take a wide range of forms, including:
 - Learning from and alongside peers
 - Adapting and replicating existing models from others
 - Coordinating giving around common themes and targets
 - Pooling together funds for a project / initiative
 - Re-granting funds to be allocated by another philanthropist
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Key points

- Trust is a critical first ingredient for collaboration and it takes time to build trust. One way is to start with smaller projects to build up a rapport and generate quick wins on less ambitious projects to demonstrate the value of collaboration, before tackling larger, complex initiatives.
- An important value-add of collaboration is bringing in people and capital on the side lines.
- Pooling funding can allow for funding at scale with bigger budgets and bigger visions. Shared decision-making in these collaboratives can often result in more well-thought-out decisions. “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” – African proverb
- Consider the impact of collaboration based on contribution rather than attribution. Expecting attribution or labelling work as “my thing” can prevent buy-in from the wider sector.
- Networks and platforms often play a critical role as an intermediary to facilitate collaboration.
- In wider collaboration, philanthropy can serve as a neutral platform to bring together different stakeholders, including businesses and the private sector, non-profit organisations and government.

Theme 4: Philanthropy and Government

Supportive government policies as well as a committed multi-sectoral approach are necessary for the impact of philanthropy to flourish. Philanthropists must also be committed to educating policymakers on the role of philanthropy and learning more effective ways of working with government to adopt and scale successful initiatives.

Context

- Governments in Asia view the role of civil society differently from the West. In fact, the term “civil society” is rarely used in Asia. There is pressure on the social sector to act in alignment with government rather than to serve as a check on government. This, along with the underdeveloped NGO sector, has contributed to an overall trust deficit within the social sector.
 - Philanthropy cannot solve the problem on its own. The actual magnitude of philanthropy is small compared to the scale of these problems or even government funding for these issues.
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Key points

- Government in Asia often sees philanthropists for their dollars but not as partners.
 - Philanthropy can provide sector expertise and on-the-ground knowledge through long-standing work in certain social issues to inform better initiatives. Philanthropy can support advocacy and public awareness campaigns to push for greater government action in ignored areas.
 - Philanthropy can test new ideas and demonstrate proof of concept through pilots, after which government can scale these initiatives for wider impact. However, for this to be successful, philanthropists must work together with other players as well as government so that the scaled-up programme is holistic even if simplified and to fit government budget and operation constraints when scaled. There may also be a higher burden of demonstrated evidence and impact for governments to replicate programmes.
 - In countries where the government is difficult to work with, identifying a local politician who shares your outlook and involving them early so they have a sense of ownership can result in a helpful champion. Even if they get all of the credit for the project, it opens up the way for future support and scaling.
 - In countries where the government is under-resourced, philanthropists can support by seconding staff to work with specific ministers or funding capacity building workshops for government officials.
 - Philanthropy can have targeted support for populations or individuals that are overlooked by government, for whatever reason, to ensure that there is still equity in society.
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Theme 5: The Future of Philanthropy

Considering COVID-19, climate change and the SDGs, it is clear that there is an immense need for philanthropy. Luckily, philanthropists are increasingly impact-driven and there are new innovations to spur greater impact or existing interventions that can be scaled across different geographies.

Context

- We are facing existentialist threats that do not respect borders. Bill Gates has said that “solving COVID is easy compared with climate”. The complexity of regional, interconnected issues and the looming crisis of climate change calls for greater action.
- Philanthropy is especially important when it comes to these issues. Unlike government or business, philanthropy is not bound by shorter timelines and maintain sustained momentum and strategies. Philanthropy can also work across the different sectors, such as through its critical and leveraged role in development finance. For more on this, see theme I on the role of philanthropy.

Key points

- There is growing opportunity for philanthropy to change the fundamental way it operates and to be more strategic, collaborative and bold to achieve change.
- Philanthropists feel the urgency for broader and deeper change beyond the “symptoms” of a problem. Philanthropy is increasingly involved in systems change and simultaneously activating different levers and levels of activities, such as engaging in policy advising, building coalitions through public advocacy, garnering attention through media and film and more.
- There is a greater push to incorporate evidence into philanthropy. Many philanthropists are using evidence to craft their philanthropic strategies to increase their impact. Evidence is also important to articulate the effectiveness of an intervention or organisation in order to grow impact (e.g. to help advocate for scaling up, to encourage replication by others, etc).
- Philanthropists are looking to expand their impact through a range of giving options, including blended finance tools (impact investment, recoverable grants, social impact bonds) to attract private sector investment as well as working through their corporates for more good.
- Along with the wealth transfer to the next generation, there will also be a values transfer in the way that philanthropy and business is done. The Next Gen have great potential to take on a wider perspective in their giving and champion complex issues.