



Better Philanthropy Telescope

February 2025

PHILANTHROPY
AUSTRALIA





ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

Philanthropy Australia acknowledges the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first inhabitants of the nation and the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we live, learn and work. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

Welcome to our Better Philanthropy Telescope

Foreword

The 2025 Better Philanthropy Telescope finds a philanthropy sector that is thinking deeply about its effectiveness and how it best contributes, working hand in hand with not-for-profits, on the issues that matter.

Telescope takes the pulse of the sector to help identify the trends, issues and opportunities that will shape the giving agenda this year. We are grateful to the 120 people, from across Australia and from various organisations, who responded to our survey.

In this third edition of our Telescope, we find a sector that more than ever is considering how external developments, including the recent US Presidential election and our upcoming federal election, global conflicts, the ongoing cost-of-living crisis and the rise of disinformation, will shape the context in which philanthropy operates.

We also find that many of the issues raised in previous years remain high priority. This speaks to an approach which values consistency through long-term thinking and relationships. However, consistency in thinking should not be understood as a static approach, we find much evolution and momentum. How philanthropy responds to the climate crisis and how First Nations communities are best supported remains front of mind for many.

For many funders, irrespective of their giving focus or their scale, the power of collaboration and the desire to understand the impact of giving are considered crucial for effective philanthropic practice.

Philanthropy Australia looks forward to exploring these themes in our work this year. Telescope is a pulse check and cannot give a full picture of the state of play of Australian philanthropy nor cover the diversity of thinking and activity. What it can do is inform conversation and motivate us to all to achieve more and better philanthropy.



Adam Ognall
Executive Director
Partnerships and Practice
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Shaping the agenda

The Philanthropy Australia Better Giving Telescope is a community created report driven by Philanthropy Australia's members.

We produced a survey that asked 6 open questions. Individuals were invited to complete the survey, with responses being anonymous. 120 people participated. Participants were from a mix of organisations – funders, non-funders (charity/not-for-profit/social enterprise) and professional advisors. The 2025 survey is our third annual survey and over time we anticipate Telescope becoming a more in-depth initiative tracking changes over time.

Disclaimer: Please note that the views in this document are those of survey respondents, not necessarily Philanthropy Australia.



Survey participants

120
respondents

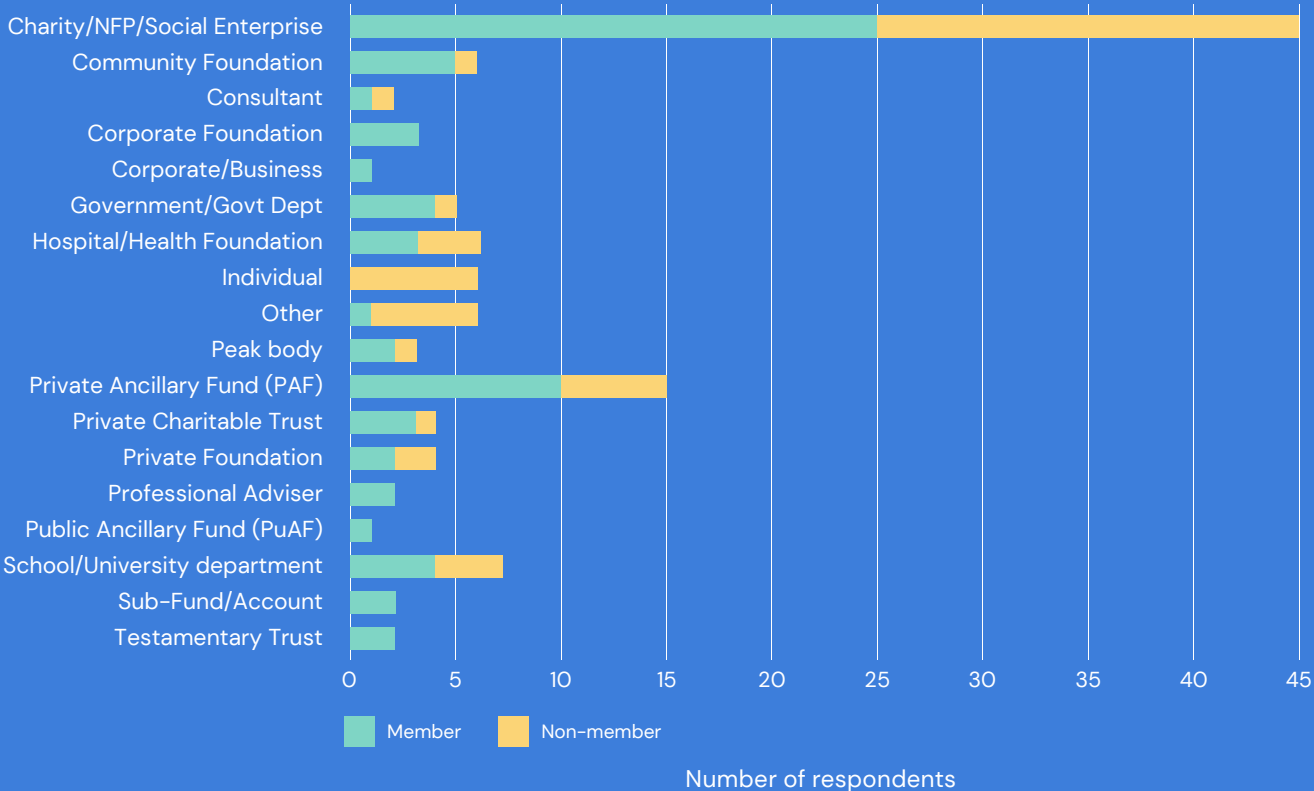
There were **120** respondents to the 2025 Better Philanthropy Telescope:

- 59% Philanthropy Australia members (71)
- 41% non-members (49)

About **41%** of the respondents were funders, **43%** were non-funders and the remaining comprised of professional advisers, consultants and others.



Types of organisations represented



10 ideas that will matter

These are the ideas most frequently mentioned by those who responded to the survey.

1

Collaboration across the sector and beyond

Many respondents want to see more collaboration across the sector: among funders, among non-funder peers, between funders and non-funders, with government and business.

“Working together can amplify the reach and impact of philanthropic efforts, benefiting more communities and causes.”

2

Peer learning and sharing

Collaboration can take many forms, but one important form of collaboration valued by respondents was for the purpose of sharing learnings and knowledge.

“Increased opportunities for sector building, learning and collaboration.”

3

Impact of changing political context

Global political shifts and uncertainty were a huge theme for 2024 and looking to 2025 many respondents are readying themselves for the implications of this and for Australia's upcoming federal election.

4

DGR reform

Finalising the Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) reform* for community foundations and the Productivity Commission philanthropy inquiry's recommendation for major DGR reform (potentially increasing the number of charities eligible to receive tax-deductible gifts) was top of mind for many respondents.

This reform has been the product of advocacy from many in the sector including Philanthropy Australia, Community Foundations Australia, members, partners and more.

*The DGR reform for community foundations will result in a new DGR 1 category for community foundations. This will make it easier for more community foundations to be eligible for DGR 1 status, facilitating new funding opportunities because donors (including private ancillary funds) will be able to make tax-deductible donations to community foundations.

5

Understanding and communicating impact

Placing impact in the centre of their practice and work, with meaningful ways to measure and communicate the impact.

“ *Focus on lived experience and evidence of impact.* ”

6

Impactful giving

The need is growing, and difficult economic conditions are continuing so philanthropy and not-for-profits are working out how to provide as much support as they can with the resources they have.

“ *Seeing if funding can go further and have a greater impact.* ”

7

Improving practice

Alongside the resource-constrained sentiments, respondents were focused on improving their organisational processes, including the experience for grantees, ongoing learning and reminded us of the importance of paying what it takes to ensure not-for-profits have sustainable operations.

8

Trust-based philanthropy and shared power

The language of trust-based philanthropy was expressed by many respondents referencing the importance of developing strong trust between partners. How to address the power imbalance was a strong sentiment, shifting the power in philanthropic practice between funders and non-funders. Others were looking forward to more community-led philanthropy, First Nations-led philanthropy and decolonising philanthropy. Recent collaborations spurred interest in place-based practice focusing on local needs. There was consideration about how this approach can work well, and where scaling up is beneficial.

“ *Moving the power imbalance from funders, towards delivery partners who deeply understand the systemic and community issues they are addressing.* ”

9

Growing giving

There is room to extend the culture of giving in Australia, encouraging more people to give and celebrating the work of not-for-profits.



More education across the industry promoting the benefits of giving to both recipients and funders.

10

Leadership

The conversation of philanthropy's role could extend to taking stronger leadership to move us toward the change respondents want to see in society.



People always focus on the money aspect of philanthropy, but I would like to see the philanthropic sector use its immense social and political capital in a more just, humane, transparent, effective and collaborative way. The urgency is immense, the stakes could not be higher on all fronts across all topics.





Big world issues in 2025 and why they matter

These are the big world issues most frequently mentioned by those who responded to the survey.

Cost-of-living

“ How to support NFP organisations to support the influx of people needing help in the current economic climate.

“ How to reverse economic and social disadvantage.

“ Addressing the polycrisis at its roots.

Climate

“ Intersection of the big challenging issues – e.g. climate change and erosion of democracy.

“ Need for funds to fight climate change NOW.

“ Climate change – should be, but the sector is not really engaging in this much yet.

Australian federal election

“ The pending federal election will be a significant influence and factor for our partners and where we might focus our giving in 2025 and beyond.

“ Federal election will create uncertainty.

“ Engaging the disengaged in political processes.

Policy advocacy

“ Many more organisations granted DGR status and many more foundations willing to support organisations which are in their infancy.

“ Shaping policy at local, state and federal levels.

“ Flexible way [sic] to donate more into funds. They should be given more incentives to help them to donate.

First Nations

“ *The opportunity presented by Indigenous-led funds.*

“ *Efforts towards decolonisation, shifting power.*

“ *How to support First Nations people and community.*

Global events

“ *Global social instability and lack of cooperation, made worse by accelerating frequency of extreme weather.*

“ *Threats to democracy, including corporate capture and the rise of mis and disinformation.*

“ *How will US politics in our region play out over the next year?*

“ *Ongoing wars in the middle east and Ukraine.*

What you're saying

1

What were the biggest influences on giving strategies and on your philanthropy in 2024, has anything restricted or inhibited your giving?

● INFLUENCING ISSUES

Similar to the findings in the 2023 Telescope report, the difficult economic conditions were a major influence on giving strategies in 2024. The cost of living impact is felt strongly throughout the entire giving experience, including funding constraints from funders, including government, and seeing increased need from grantees and communities.

The urgency of climate change was another common area of concern, as has been the case in all Telescope surveys. Respondents are influenced by their responsibilities to First Nations communities following the Voice Referendum. The political environment, including the upcoming federal election, is another influence for some respondents. A few respondents see growing importance in bequests, the intergenerational wealth transfer and digital readiness.

“ Trying to shift away from funding the bandaids to actually funding systems change that addresses the roots of the polycrisis.

● INFLUENTIAL VOICES

Listening to community voices and local needs was important for many funder and non-funder respondents. It was evident there was increasing need and demand on the ground.

“ Listening to grant partners and hearing about the increased costs due to cost of living pressures.

● INTERNAL ORGANISATIONAL INFLUENCES

Funders were committed to aligning giving with their strategic vision/pillars and values. While some respondents were confident to fund as much as they have previously done – and some more so – the consequences of the cost of living conditions weighed heavily on many respondents, limiting what they could do with their resources, ability to fundraise and bearing increased costs. These are similar sentiments to the previous two Telescope surveys.

2

What do you expect the most pressing challenges facing you and your partners in 2025 will be?

● GLOBAL AND NATIONAL CHALLENGES

Similar to the expectations over the last two years, the difficult economic conditions are expected to continue, but now alongside new challenges, including the upcoming federal election in Australia and the uncertainty of global political environment, particularly in the US, as well as conflicts in Israel and Palestine and Ukraine.

Some respondents expect challenges relating to protecting democracy and addressing misinformation and disinformation. Several respondents were concerned about the potential of 'politicisation' of issues during the election campaign.

Many respondents emphasise the urgency of the climate transition.

“ *The pending federal election will be a significant influence and factor for our partners and where we might focus our giving in 2025 and beyond.* ”

“ *The need to resource the climate transition.* ”

● PHILANTHROPIC CHALLENGES

The challenges relating to NFP grantee eligibility was raised by a several funders, and the challenge of making funds go further. Respondents expect ongoing challenging cost of living and economic conditions. Several respondents raised issues around low visibility/awareness of organisations which impact access to giving and receiving funds.

“ *Sustained economic downturn and increase in community need.* ”

● ORGANISATIONAL CHALLENGES

Managing costs were top of mind for many respondents, especially for the funders that expect increases in costs and reduced capacity to fund, while also aware that non-funders are experiencing similar pressures and potentially reduced funding. Addressing the power imbalance was another challenge some respondents expect to see.

“ *The desire to keep increasing impact, with no increase in resourcing.* ”

“ *Slowness of educating funders to truly shifting funding and power to NFPs.* ”

3

What opportunities do you see that might help you and your partners advance their work?

EXTERNAL OPPORTUNITIES

Many respondents are interested in collaboration and partnership opportunities among their peers and between funders and non-funders. They see opportunities to share learning and collaborative approaches.

Supporting opportunities for the climate transition was another common response. A few respondents see opportunity in the intergenerational wealth transfer, bequests and technology including digital capability and artificial intelligence (AI), and government support for specific cause areas.



Increased opportunities for sector building, learning and collaboration.

ORGANISATIONAL GROWTH

At the organisational level there was similar strong interest in collaboration and partnership opportunities among peers and between funders and non-funders.

Some immediate and tangible opportunities were around streamlining processes, digital and technology capability, and more shared learnings on their approaches.

REFORM AGENDA

Respondents are interested in the recommendations from Productivity Commission's Inquiry into Philanthropy's final report, 'Future foundations for giving,' particularly its recommendation for comprehensive DGR reform to broaden eligibility for DGR status and simplify the system. This has been a long-standing policy advocacy priority for Philanthropy Australia.

Some respondents are looking forward to the finalisation of the DGR reform for community foundations. Secured through the advocacy of Philanthropy Australia, Community Foundations Australia and our members and partners, this significant reform will make it easier for community foundations to receive funds, including from private ancillary funds, and to facilitate granting to organisations and groups without DGR status.

Respondents shared uplifting sentiments on achieving impact (despite the challenges).

Several respondents saw opportunity to support First Nations-led initiatives such as funding and new First Nations-led projects.

4

How do you expect your philanthropic practice to change in the next 12 months?

● FUNDING PRACTICES

We heard a range of responses: some will decrease funding, a few will increase, and some – but a lower proportion than last year's survey – will not make any substantial changes over the next 12 months. Several funders described wanting to be more focused with their granting. Others expect to provide untied funding, taking a long-term view and improving the grants process.

Interest in seeking collaborations to improve their practice was again a common theme among respondents.

“ Our foundation is growing and we are trying to get clearer about our focus.

● ORGANISATIONAL PRACTICES

Respondents will be prioritising their efforts as certain activities are too resource intensive.

Similar to last year, growing and maintaining collaborative efforts with other organisations are important.

There is interest among some respondents of the implications of an ageing population and bequests.

“ Focus on refining what we already do and finding ways to do it better.

5

What are the big ideas that will matter for philanthropy in 2025?

For the third year, **collaboration** is a big recurring theme. Collaboration across the whole sector: among funders, among non-funder peers, between funders and non-funders and with government.

“ Authenticity and genuine connection.

“ Anything that brings organisations together to work for joint or shared impact.

“ I think we will see increasing demand for orgs joining forces across sectors and borders.

“ Strategic philanthropy that leverages collective effort for even greater impact.

“ Contributing towards the greatest needs. Collectively determining how to do that best.

Addressing the **climate transition** was another top recurring theme in this and previous Telescope surveys.

“ Addressing the polycrisis at its roots.

“ Need for funds to fight climate change NOW.

Impact measurement returns as another big idea mentioned by many respondents.

“ Measuring the social impact of charitable organisations.

“ How we evaluate and define impact.

“ Impact and measurement frameworks (that in turn will guide organisational strategies, funding priorities).

There were some new big ideas given the political events in 2024 and upcoming federal election in 2025 around **political uncertainty**, **economic inequality** and the importance of protecting **democracy**.

“ Intersection of the big challenging issues – e.g. climate change and erosion of democracy.

“ Global social instability and lack of cooperation, made worse by accelerating frequency of extreme weather.

“ Democracy resilience.

“ How to support NFP organisations to support the influx of people needing help in the current economic climate.

Trust-based philanthropy was raised by a number of respondents.

“ A continued shift to trust-based philanthropy.

“ I hear a lot about the need to take a trust-based approach to giving. The big idea will be how to do this in an era of eroding trust and growing division in society.

Respondents also expressed interest in **place-based philanthropy**.

“ Localisation of philanthropic efforts through place-based approaches.

“ Place-based solutions finding their place amongst large scale solutions.

The opportunities of the **intergenerational wealth transfer** were highlighted by some respondents.

“ Localisation of philanthropic efforts through place-based approaches.

“ Place-based solutions finding their place amongst large scale solutions.

Respondents were hopeful about growing the **culture of giving, encouraging more giving** through reforms and other ways.

“ Improving the culture of giving in Australia.

“ Increasing the number of philanthropists across Australia.

“ Shaping policy at local, state and federal levels.

“ Flexible way to donate more into funds. They should be given more incentives to help them to donate.

Respondents are interested in **decolonising philanthropy and First Nations-led philanthropy**.

“ The opportunity presented by Indigenous-led funds.

“ Efforts towards decolonisation, shifting power.

The **Pay What It Takes** campaign is important to respondents.

Other respondents are anticipating the government policy response ahead of federal election. Respondents expressed the growing importance of recognised lived experience and local needs, women's giving, different philanthropic approaches taken (venture, catalytic, spend down, blended, collective giving, next gen, corporate/business), and cause areas including affordable housing and homelessness, disability, digital inclusion and capability, circular economy, women, children, family and domestic violence, disadvantage, health and medical, pesticide pollution, education, mental health, veterans, the arts, human rights, multi-cultural communities, human rights, asylum seekers, and survivors of modern slavery.

6

What is the biggest change (or changes) you would like to see occur in philanthropy in 2025?

Similar to the previous Telescope surveys, **collaboration** was one of the biggest changes respondents want to see in 2025: among peers, between funders and non-funders, with government, business, advisers and with other organisations in the sector. Authenticity, trust and transparency is important, and the beneficial outcomes that can be achieved through collaboration is the most exciting part for respondents.

“ Whole of sector approach, donors, advisors and fund seekers working together.

“ Please work with to build collaboration and knowledge sharing, and collaborative thinking and investment design.

“ Serving on boards or spending time within smaller organisations to really get a sense of the challenges and support that can be worked through together.

“ More collaborative funding/co-funding.

“ Government need to review how they can partner and open pathways for charities and donors to partner with them for develop real improvements/outcomes.

“ Assessing impact, collaboration, a continued shift to trust-based philanthropy.

“ More cross-sectorial conversation and collaboration.

Many respondents want to grow the **culture of giving**, see **greater and more impactful giving** in 2025 with **more learning, education and celebration** of philanthropy and the work of not-for-profits. Some respondents would like to see more done to make the most of the **intergenerational wealth transfer** and encourage **wealthy people with the capacity to give**.

“ More education across the industry promoting the benefits of giving to both recipients and funders.

“ More of a collaboration on converting those who currently do not give and have capacity to do so.

“ For it to become more widespread.

“ Greater public examples of baby-boomer philanthropy to encourage greater giving/bequests.

“ I would like to see more ordinary people giving small benefactions where they could see the accumulation of financial and social support, and value the measured impacts.

“ Almost anyone can give some of their time and/or talents. It doesn't take much to make a real difference. Introduce initiatives within education institutions, workplaces etc to enhance giving and build a philanthropic mindset/culture.

“ Greater engagement in multiple generations of a family.

“ Enabling greater accessibility to wealth managers to support the diversification of how wealth is accessed and/or promoted.

“ That people with money give back to groups who are struggling. If I had the millions I would share and help.

“ Celebration of smaller gifts in the media (and market). A \$25K gift can lead to bigger gifts (living or as a bequest) and should be acknowledged it all adds up.

“ The media promoting and celebrating “Big Gifts” not just to universities but to charities of all sizes.

Respondents want to see more on **DGR reform**, including the current reform for community foundations.

“ Many more organisations granted DGR status and many more foundations willing to support organisations which are in their infancy.

“ Get the DGR stuff done and dusted.

“ The new DGR changes accepted and understood.

There are continued calls to **focus on shifting power, decolonising philanthropy, making philanthropy more accessible and transparent**. Several respondents mentioned specific practices such as **multi-year and untied funding**, as well as **impact measurement**. A few suggested similar charities **joining together or even merging**.

Respondents reiterated the urgency of addressing the **climate** transition.

“ More of it! An increase in focus towards climate and environment organisations given the time-bound urgency of this issue.

“ Moving the power imbalance from funders, towards delivery partners who deeply understand the systemic and community issues they are addressing.

“ Continual growth in opportunities to secure multi-year and operational funding.

“ Decolonising grantmaking practices.

“ Help smaller organisations, as big ones have more visibility, but small can be doing impactful things.

“ More transparency. Philanthropy and donors can come across as too unapproachable and as a result their role and motivations are often misunderstood.

“ Reframe overheads! And also move to multi year giving, where proper evaluation and better understanding of impacts is feasible.

“ Untied funding and adaptability to be able to provide workable solutions in areas of need.

Respondents want to see **leadership for change**.

“ I would like to see more vocality from people in elite positions.

“ Recognition of the unique space of philanthropy to create a more non-politized agenda for positive societal outcome.

Finally, accelerating the take up of impact investing and the alignment of philanthropic capital with mission reducing the barriers to the use of philanthropic capital and impact investing was championed by a number of respondents.

“ Shifting balance sheets to deploy for impact. True impact.

“ Pipeline of social investments.

Other respondents are inspired by the philanthropy abroad, and some on where a local focus or scaling up would work.

Thank you to all the respondents that participated in Philanthropy Australia's 2025 Telescope survey.



Philanthropy Australia thanks for their continued support

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