

# Focus groups and roundtables summary

4/09/2025

## Focus groups and roundtables

This year, Philanthropy Australia (PA) has undertaken a national consultation process with members and stakeholders. Through 14 focus groups and state-based roundtables, we gathered diverse insights from across the philanthropic ecosystem.

This update shares the key themes that emerged, structured around three guiding questions. It reflects the collective intelligence of our community and will inform PA's future direction.

### 1. What does the sector need most to accelerate momentum, and what is PA's role in supporting this?

#### A call for bold leadership, infrastructure and connection

Across all sessions, members expressed a desire for PA to lead with clarity and courage, supporting the sector to grow, evolve and collaborate more effectively.

#### Key themes:

**Reclaiming the narrative of philanthropy:** Members urged PA to lead a national conversation that reframes philanthropy as inclusive, values-driven and impactful.

"Philanthropy is time, talent, treasure, ties, and testimony.

"We need to undertake narrative therapy. The word 'philanthropy' feels elitist, old-fashioned."

**Building sector infrastructure and knowledge:** There was strong support for PA to invest in research, data and professional development.

"We would love to fund PA to do research, to talk to government and make it easier to be effective."

"There's lots of evidence about what doesn't work in philanthropy. Let's bring some light to that."

**Strengthening collaboration and systems change:** Members want PA to act as a connector, facilitating partnerships across philanthropy, government and civil society.

"It's all about storytelling. The collective impact that can be created with philanthropy and government."

"PA, at its best, is a convener of connection and dialogue."

**Supporting new and emerging models:** There is growing interest in impact investing, intergenerational giving and community-led approaches.

"Let's help people understand the levers they have: grants, corpus, balance sheet and networks."

"There's a huge opportunity to shape how wealth is transferred—not just to the usual suspects, but to where it can do the most good."

### 2. How is the sector shifting, and how should PA respond over time?

#### A sector in transition towards inclusion, transparency and shared leadership

Participants described a sector that is becoming more diverse, more scrutinised and more ambitious. They called on PA to evolve in step with these changes.

## Key themes:

**Democratising giving:** There is a strong push to broaden participation and decouple philanthropy from wealth.

"Giving happens all the time by people who've never heard of PA. We risk recolonising giving by pretending it doesn't."

"Make it easier for people to engage, especially those unfamiliar with the sector."

**Clarifying PA's purpose:** Members want PA to be clear about its role, balancing service to members with sector leadership.

"We will fall short if we try to be all things to all people."

"The tension is representing and leading at the same time."

**Embedding equity and inclusion:** There is a call for PA to centre First Nations voices, support regional and underrepresented communities, and reflect Australia's diversity.

"Create space for members, critics and stakeholders to connect."

"Doubling giving doesn't help Indigenous communities because twice what they currently get is still far too little."

**Preparing for the future:** Members highlighted the need to respond to AI, intergenerational change and geopolitical shifts.

"AI will make philanthropy irrelevant unless we respond now."

"In the future, philanthropy isn't going to look like it does today. What's the strategy for that?"

## 3. What do you value most in your engagement with PA?

### Connection, learning and a sense of belonging

Members consistently praised PA's convening role, sector insights and staff support. At the same time, they identified opportunities to improve clarity, accessibility and value.

## Key themes:

**Events and peer learning:** Members value opportunities to connect, share and learn from one another.

"Finding people that are like me, that I'm not alone. That's what I value the most."

"Some of the best relationships we've forged were at a PA event. Not because of the content but because of the conversations around it."

**Clarity and accessibility:** Members called for clearer communication about membership categories, event formats and engagement pathways.

"Understand the rules of engagement. Be clear if it's a non-solicitation event."

"I wanted to find an easier way to connect with like-minded philanthropists."

**Support from PA staff:** Personalised advice and responsiveness were frequently mentioned as highlights.

"Having someone to actually talk to, who can point you in the right direction, was really important for us."



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