

beauty of giving back



# Philanthropists of Influence

By Yolanda F. Johnson

We celebrate women who lead the way in so many areas of life throughout this issue of BELLA. And as a leader in philanthropy and the author of this column, I would be remiss not to recognize a few women who are trailblazers in the realm of “good work,” and who truly exemplify the beauty of giving back to our communities and to the world.

Here are four women of influence in philanthropy, along with their thoughts on the importance of giving back, how they are changing the world, and more...

## Elizabeth Abel

Philanthropy Expert  
and Senior Vice President  
CCS Fundraising



*Why is it important to give back to our communities both locally and to the world at large?*

I believe philanthropy is one of the most powerful tools to drive social change. To give back is to invest in our collective future and to realize a more just, equitable, and inclusive world for all.

I am motivated by the Jewish value of Tikkun Olam—to “repair the world” through education, philanthropy, and social action. This philosophy is

central to my role as an executive at a global fundraising consulting firm, a university instructor, and a mother.

*How would you like to change the world through your philanthropic influence?*

My mission is to empower nonprofit leaders and their teams with the fundraising strategies to grow

their revenue and amplify their impact. To date, I have led development initiatives and capital campaigns that have collectively raised half a billion dollars for education, healthcare, arts and culture, and advocacy organizations that, in turn, positively impact tens of thousands of lives.

*What’s the greatest advice you can give to aspiring women philanthropists?*

The beauty of philanthropy is that it’s an expression of your values and the causes you care about. You can donate. You can volunteer. You can march. You can show compassion. Each of these actions contributes to our vision for a better world. Whatever you choose, consider how your philanthropy will bring you energy, meet the moment, and inspire positive change.

*Tell us about your most meaningful philanthropic endeavor to date?*

My most meaningful experience has been leading a multimillion-dollar campaign with an advocacy organization committed to fighting antisemitism and all forms of hate. To partner with an organization whose mission directly affects my family and the Jewish community at a time when we are experiencing historic levels of antisemitism has been deeply personal. Together, we are leveraging philanthropy to scale their programs, technology, and impact.



## Jeannie Sager

Director  
Women’s Philanthropy Institute  
Indiana University Lilly School of  
Philanthropy

*Why is it important to give back to our communities both locally and to the world at large?*

This moment in history that we are experiencing demonstrates more than ever why it is important to give back and lift up our communities. The global pandemic has shown us how interconnected our world is and how vital it is that we care for one another. From neighbors helping neighbors through mutual aid to gifts that helped accelerate the development of a vaccine, the ways in which philanthropy has stepped up have been extraordinary.

*How would you like to change the world through your philanthropic influence?*

I am truly grateful to be able to have a platform that allows me to help more people embrace and encourage being a philanthropist. It’s important that women understand that all the ways they demonstrate generosity are acts of philanthropy and that those acts help build a more just and equitable world.

*What’s the greatest advice you can give to aspiring women philanthropists?*

Understand that philanthropy isn’t just giving money, you can support an organization with gifts of time, talent, advocacy, and social ties. Be sure to place value on these resources and recognize that these gifts have impact. Avoid donor paralysis and feel confident about giving; this might require taking chances and trusting your instincts but find the courage to be bold and give.

*Tell us about your most meaningful philanthropic endeavor to date (or in the future if it’s to come).*

Recently I was introduced as an “impactful leader” who is “helping to lead a global movement to document and promote the philanthropy leadership of women of all walks of life.” Now that is what I call a meaningful endeavor! As the first full-time director for the Women’s Philanthropy Institute, I have an amazing opportunity to elevate and celebrate women and how they use generosity to influence and engage in our world. When the first image that comes to mind when someone hears the word philanthropist is a woman, I will have helped play a role in that mind shift.



## Tracey Webb

Founder  
Black Benefactors

*Why is it important to give back to our communities both locally and to the world at large?*

The largest source of charitable giving in 2020 came from individuals at nearly 70%. This statistic alone demonstrates the importance of giving back.

Organizations such as food banks, shelters, and social service organizations rely on our support to sustain our communities, whether it’s local or global. Giving locally can allow you to see the impact of your gift firsthand.

*How would you like to change the world through your philanthropic influence?*

I would like to change the world through my philanthropic influence in two ways: By encouraging support of Black-led nonprofits, and by inspiring others to make philanthropic giving part of their household budget. Just as you would budget for a vacation, how about setting aside funds to make a year-end donation to your favorite nonprofit or buy tickets to an annual fundraiser? If you don’t have the funds to donate, you can donate your time. Search for in-person and virtual volunteer opportunities in your area of interest.

*What’s the greatest advice you can give to aspiring women philanthropists?*

Don’t fall into the mindset that only large gifts are impactful and that giving to family and friends doesn’t count as “philanthropy.” Philanthropy means “love of mankind.”

*Tell us about your most meaningful philanthropic endeavor to date (or in the future if it’s to come)?*

I created Black Benefactors as a giving circle in 2005 to fund and support Black-led nonprofits in the Washington, DC area and officially launched in 2007. We’ve granted nearly \$100,000 to Black-led organizations in the fields of community organizing, youth development, theater arts, mentoring, food justice, and more. I’m always looking ahead, so my future plan is to develop new ways to give collectively that’s fun and exciting. Stay tuned!



## Nina Christine Yacavino

Philanthropist and Beauty Influencer

*Why is it important to give back to our communities both locally and to the world at large?*

I believe each of us has a moral obligation to enrich the lives of others through giving, be it monetarily or simply volunteering your time. The essence of

giving fosters so much for both the receiver and giver. Immersing yourself in a local cause that holds

importance strengthens your own character and shows positive profound refinements to our communities. For example, while down in Palm Beach for the season, we are volunteering with Loggerhead Marine Life Center’s Blue Friends program. We will be dedicating our Saturday mornings to cleaning the beaches. It’s a simple, effortless way to ensure the safety of marine life and keep beach-goers happy.

*How would you like to change the world through your philanthropic influence?*

Philanthropy has a profound effect. As a child, my grandfather had such a reverence for the arts. He helped start the New Jersey State Opera, the New Jersey Ballet, Caldwell Arts Center, and so much more. Through this exposure, my love and appreciation for the artistic world emerged. I would like my giving to also influence and help shape my compassion and character.

*What’s the greatest advice you can give to aspiring women philanthropists?*

I tend to support causes both large and small. Recently I had dinner with a woman who mentioned she runs a local horse charity, and I was so moved by her mission that I decided to support that evening. Let your intuition guide your giving. Sometimes you may find that those older, established foundations you once were faithful to are now not allocating their funds accordingly and it’s best to revisit your gifting portfolio.

*Tell us about your most meaningful philanthropic endeavor to date (or in the future if it’s to come)?*

Everyone who knows me knows I’m passionate about the Puglia region of Italy. It’s the “wind of my ancestors,” as my mother so eloquently always says. In these last few years, they have had horrific environmental problems with a bacterium called xylella fastidiosa that has killed millions of olive trees—some that are even centuries old! I’m researching ways for my Fiori di Puglia fund to help establish more global awareness and hopefully facilitate planting.

*Taking everything that these incredible women have shared, I hope that each of you can find your very own ways to lean into using your own influence to make your world—and your community—more beautiful through the power of giving back.*