
BRENNINKMEIJER FAMILY ENTERPRISE PHILANTHROPIES



Leslie Johnston,
CEO, Laudes
Foundation



Melanie Schultz van
Haegen, CEO and
Chairwoman,
Porticus



George Kabalt,
Head of Climate
Project Team

Incorporating climate change as a philanthropic strategy

Triggered by the IPCC report on global warming of 1.5°C in late 2018, the philanthropies of the Brenninkmeijer family entrepreneurs, decided to give all their foundations and other philanthropic entities a new strategic direction by incorporating climate change strategies.

The foundations embarked on a strategic process with a small team of the philanthropies' executives and senior staff. In one of their first working sessions, the family entrepreneurs decided to focus on climate change mitigation rather than adaptation, and mandated the team to develop a focus for future climate-related giving.

They started an open-ended investigation to work out the best way to foster climate action. All topics, regions and philanthropic levers related to tackling climate change were evaluated for their potential to create positive impact. They applied a list of criteria to help to narrow down the thematic and geographic areas. These criteria included the biggest potential to mitigate CO₂ emissions; resonance with the family entrepreneurs; and the fit with the philanthropies and their existing strategies and funding areas.

After each step, the project sounding board reflected on the findings to see how the results resonated with the family entrepreneurs. Further, the group organised two closed-door convenings at the Marshall Institute with experts, other funders, and some of the family entrepreneurs to enable deeper discussion on the priority areas.

As a result of this process, two strategies for the group's philanthropies were approved. The first was to continue the best of what the foundations were already doing, e.g. Good Energies' work on forest protection, or the former C&A Foundation's work to effect change through industry (and in this case via the Built Environment industry). The second was to focus on accelerating the transition to a post-carbon society, including aspects like just transition, financial incentives and innovation.

“...criteria to help to narrow down the thematic and geographic areas... included the biggest potential to mitigate CO₂ emissions; resonance with the family entrepreneurs; and the fit with the philanthropies and their existing strategies and funding areas.”

Once the strategies were approved, the executives and some senior staff from the philanthropies were asked to develop a plan for integrating them into their work. Although not all staff were involved, each strategy was communicated to the full foundations teams, and given the urgency around climate mitigation, the staff very much welcomed the new focus on what is one of the most critical challenges of our times.

Having a shared theory of change with shared outcomes and outputs across all the entities further enhanced collaboration across the group. Working with the external parties was essential, because they ensured that they were doing the analysis on this complex topic in the right way and they helped to objectify the findings and preferences and keep a neutral, entity-agnostic way of thinking.

“ Having a shared theory of change with shared outcomes and outputs across all the entities further enhanced collaboration across the group.”

Recommendations for funders

- Advocate climate action to other foundations.
- Help accelerate a just transition, e.g. by reaching out to people and telling them why a post-carbon society will be good for them, and why they should be part of the transition. Private foundations have much more freedom than public players to support such movements.
- Fund research or help change the narrative around climate.
- It is a matter of choice, rather than optimisation, because all topics, regions and levers of climate action need more support.