

Partnerships in Philanthropy That Deliver Lasting Results

Strong collaborations help Pew and philanthropists amplify impact and achieve shared goals

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The Pew Charitable Trusts works with philanthropists to make long-lasting, powerful, positive change—always based on solid research and tangible goals.

Through more than 70 years of working on important societal issues, we've learned that public-spirited individuals and organizations can change the world when they come together, exchange knowledge, and leverage resources. That's why Pew seeks partners who share our commitment to serving the public good so that together we can deliver greater results.



Sally O'Brien

The Pew Charitable Trusts

[Sally O'Brien](#), who leads Pew's efforts with philanthropic partners, discusses how visionary donors who want to use quantifiable data and achieve tangible goals can make transformative change in the world.

Q: How is philanthropy changing?

The past decade or so has seen a real evolution in philanthropy, both in the approaches used for making investments and also in the philanthropic community itself. Today many philanthropists are entrepreneurs and approach investments in a different way. They're risk takers who want to see measurable results, and they often want to be engaged in identifying solutions. Pew is a terrific partner for donors like this because we know how to get things

done and have a track record of quantifiable outcomes. We also have a lot of experience with investment approaches that leverage “big bets” or seek to make “systems change.”

Q: What do you mean by big bets and systems change?

Many of today’s donors express a desire to help effect powerful social change. Making a big-bet investment—a single, substantial donation—to an organization with a proven track record can amplify results. It allows the organization to leverage out-of-the-box thinking to tackle a problem in a new and sustained way and solve it—not for the short term but in perpetuity. Big bets can be very smart bets.

A systems-change approach to fixing problems recognizes that often the laws, administrative rules, and official practices governing those issues will need to change, too. It requires the partnership of many organizations, groups, and individuals who are already tackling a specific issue to work together to achieve a common goal. Pew has considerable experience in collaborating with others to develop a multifaceted approach and build effective coalitions to drive change. As Helen Keller said, “Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”



Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona needs nearly \$330 million in repairs, including upkeep on trails, roads, and water systems. Through a partnership initiated by the Lyda Hill Philanthropies, Pew is seeking increased federal funding to meet maintenance needs throughout the National Park System.

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Q: Can you give an example?

Using a traditional approach, a funder might have donated to a local conservancy to help buy a piece of land to protect its cultural value and biodiversity from exploitation. Pew's systems-change approach takes a different tack. In the case of land conservation, Pew has formed alliances with local leaders, businesses, and other conservation groups, supported by our philanthropic partners, with the goal of creating policy changes that convert vast swaths of federal land into protected areas. By determining what policy mechanisms would best safeguard these lands and then working to encourage their adoption, this approach resulted in the [passage of a historic, bipartisan public lands bill](#).

Q: What sets Pew apart for donors?

We're large enough and experienced enough to readily oversee significant investments, yet small enough to be nimble and quick in managing them. Our history as a longtime funder before becoming a public charity in 2002 puts us in a unique position to understand the issues involved in achieving desired outcomes, particularly around vetting projects, evaluating them, measuring effectiveness and planning a path to success. And we are mindful of stewarding a donor's investment in the best and most responsible way possible.

Q: Can donors bring their own ideas to Pew?

Absolutely, and a great example of this is our project to address the \$11.9 billion [maintenance backlog in the national parks](#), a big bet inspired by philanthropist Lyda Hill. Like many Americans, Lyda is a big fan of the national parks and has been dismayed by the crumbling roads, bridges, and historic buildings in the parks. This neglect strikes at the very heart of how much we value our national identity, the landscapes and historical landmarks that define America.

The care of our parks is a national responsibility that rests largely with our federal government—no single person or nonprofit can solve it alone. Knowing this, Lyda came to Pew to ask us to take on the challenge of seeking a lasting, pragmatic solution that could be agreed upon by Congress. We worked with coalition partners to help enact the bipartisan National Park Service Centennial Act, which resulted in a federal program that has the potential to direct up to \$50 million annually to deferred maintenance projects.

Pew continues to work with Republican and Democratic members of Congress on several legislative initiatives that will provide dedicated annual federal funding to address the National Park Service maintenance backlog.

Q: This is a time of great political division in the U.S., with people coming at subjects from different

perspectives. How can Pew’s work help bring people together?

We’re living in challenging times, what some call the “post-truth era.” But Pew has always relied on the facts. Our work is grounded in rigorous research and data. We are also scrupulously nonpartisan, facilitating collaboration among partners with diverse points of view. We’ve found that sharing solid data often enables us to bring together business leaders, elected officials, and advocacy groups that no one imagined could work alongside each other. We believe that facts—thoroughly researched and delivered without any spin—can unite us. Donors can be confident that Pew will bring all of these assets to bear on issues that are important to them.



In partnership with the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative encourages states and counties to invest in policies and programs that are proved to work. This helps to ensure that policy decisions are results-focused.

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Q: What are some ways donors can work with Pew?

There are many. Donors can make individual gifts towards one of Pew’s wide range of projects either to support the overall project goals or to a specific aspect of the work that directly appeals to them. These gifts range in size from \$50,000 to \$5 million.

Pew’s donor-advised funds offer a unique platform for philanthropic giving, in which donors can recommend grants to qualified nonprofit groups which are then shepherded by Pew. Our staff can research potential funding areas, develop grant application processes, and create learning opportunities for donors with experts and fellow philanthropists for a highly

customized philanthropic experience. A donor-advised fund at Pew could be a donor's primary giving vehicle or used to complement his or her existing philanthropy.

In addition, Pew can work in partnership on a project, as we do with the [Pew Bertarelli Ocean Legacy Project](#), which is creating large marine reserves around the world, or the [Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative](#), which helps state policymakers establish new ways to evaluate the effectiveness of programs. Of course, we're also sensitive to the fact that some donors prefer to remain anonymous, and are happy to accommodate them. I should also mention that a number of donors have let us know that Pew will be remembered in their estate plans.

However a donor chooses to engage with us, our primary objective is to work with philanthropists to build a mutually beneficial partnership based on shared goals.

Q: How can donors learn more?

We participate in various philanthropic events and organizations, like The Philanthropy Workshop, and the National Center for Family Philanthropy. Our staff welcomes the opportunity to talk with donors about your philanthropic goals. For more information about partnering with Pew or to make an investment, feel free to contact me, Sally O'Brien, senior vice president of institutional partnerships, at invest@pewtrusts.org or 202.540.6525.

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