Give from the Heart—But Why Not Give SMART!

by Lyn Balistreri, Director of Fund Development

Philanthropy is deeply personal.

In today's world, there are countless needs and multiple agencies to address them—from whom, every day, we receive multiple "asks" that seem to speak directly to us.

Some causes have almost universal appeal. Who wouldn't want to help a child with cancer, or feed a hungry person? Others causes, such as preserving a local park—or helping individuals who learn differently—will likely appeal most to those whom they directly affect.

We might give to a cause simply because it catches us at the right moment. For instance, you might decide to support a friend’s online birthday fundraiser, put some change in Santa’s kettle, or give towards a so-called "checkout charity" at your local supermarket.

These fundraising strategies are wonderful ways to support a nonprofit's annual fund, the money it raises on an ongoing basis throughout the year to help fund its day-to-day needs. On the other hand, they are less likely than others to generate any nonprofit’s most cherished friend: the recurring donor.

For us to give once, a cause must appeal to our intellect. It is easy and convenient—and probably won't bite hard into our budgets—to round up the cost of our groceries to support a worthy cause. But for us to continue that support on an ongoing basis, it must appeal to our hearts. We must feel enough of a personal connection to its mission that we are willing to go out of our way to further it.

Impact

There is no question that when it comes to impact, some philanthropy is more measurable than others. It is most helpful when our impact is presented as immediate and specific, e.g. "X amount of dollars will provide X meals to shelter pets." But that need is recurring, so giving is only a temporary fix to an ongoing need. Other causes, such as saving rainforests, have less-tangible immediate results but may well have a huge impact in the long run.
The term “making a difference” has become terribly overused by nonprofits. No one person can solve all the world’s problems, and most of us can only give a very limited amount at any given time. The constant appeals for support leave many of us feeling bad that, even if we DO give, we cannot give more.

What it all comes down to, when it comes to giving, is what you want your personal impact to be: Short- or long-term; local or worldwide; of benefit to two-legged, four-legged, finned, or winged creatures. But whatever preferred cause(s) resonate with your heart, I would submit this for your consideration:

**You can almost certainly do more to support your favorite cause than you might think—without hurting your own financial situation in the slightest, and perhaps even improving it!**

A bold statement, I admit. Individuals who call the Bay Area home are among the savviest donors to be found anywhere. I have no doubt that most of our loyal donors have skilled financial planners to help them manage their wealth, whether that be modest, vast, or (like me) imaginary.

That said, most financial planners are NOT specialists in Charitable Giving Strategies. While they may be wonderful at helping you manage your money, their goal is to protect and grow your net worth. That is where “Smart Giving” comes in, and why we are so excited to be launching this program at Morrissey-Compton. Our goal is to help you find creative ways to manage your assets and accounts that can benefit both you and the causes you care about—whatever those might be.

**What Do We Mean By “Smart Giving?”**

Here is a question for you: Were you able to itemize your charitable gift deductions last year, or did the new standard deduction make it unnecessary for the first time? If it is the latter, you are well-positioned to discover how you might become a Smart Giver!

**Smart Giving is when you learn how to leverage your financial resources to benefit your favorite nonprofit organization(s).** Connecting with a financial planning specialist with special expertise in charitable giving is likely the most effective way to accomplish this goal. Your individual wishes and potential outcomes might include:

- Increase the impact of your gift without necessarily giving more
- Minimize capital gains, income, and estate taxes
- Prevent taxation of assets going to your heirs
- Guarantee retirement income
- Integrate Long Term Care Planning
- Preserve your assets
- Free up or leverage unproductive assets
- Become a part of a legacy society

Program Origins

In January, we invited our loyal supporters to participate in an online survey to share with us their vision for Morrissey-Compton's future (we are still collecting responses, and I would love to share the results with you in a future newsletter). But one thing that became clear to us right away was that if we wished to position ourselves for maximum success in the coming years it was time to launch a planned giving program that incorporated many different ways to give, including a legacy society.

For the past few months, I have been working with a local Certified Planned Giving Specialist who has generously given his time to help Morrissey-Compton create and launch our Smart Giving program. His guidance has been invaluable, and if you are interested in setting up a consultation with him, he is happy to do so free of charge*.

However, the first step to becoming a Smart Giver is to get in touch with me so that we might discuss your goals and potential resources. My contact info is in the box above.

So, what do you think…shall we make this a win-win for both you and the causes you care about? Let’s talk about it!

*Morrissey-Compton Educational Center does not endorse any one financial planner, will receive no financial gain from facilitating contact with a financial planner, and may or may not ultimately benefit from a consultation.

Our Case for Support

Although this article is meant to get one to think about charitable giving in general, we would be remiss if we did not point out that, although its focus is very specific, Morrissey-Compton Educational Center has a leg up over many other agencies in how its annual fund ties into its long-term impact.

Our annual fund is heavily centered around filling an immediate need, which is raising money to provide full and partial scholarships for families who would not otherwise be able to afford our services. But the long-term effect of those services is limitless, because when an individual gains access to those services, they become better-equipped to become successful in life. These individuals are tomorrow’s leaders, teachers, innovators, and healers—after 37 years, Morrissey-Compton’s long-term impact on many lives is undeniable.

So…if your goal is to have an impact on future generations…then choosing to include Morrissey-Compton Educational Center in your Smart Giving may well be the ideal investment!—