

## GUEST ARTICLE: Year-End Tips For Helping Clients Navigate Philanthropy

**SUSAN WINER, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER & FOUNDER, STRATEGIC PHILANTHROPY**

**December 12, 2016**

As the end of the year comes into view, those with philanthropy efforts and projects should take time out to review what they are doing. A top-level expert in the field sets out some points of advice.

The process of supporting particular causes and contributing money or less liquid assets to them might sound a straightforward task but as readers of this news service will know, the opposite is often the case. Philanthropy is frequently complex and raises a number of challenges, such as the most efficient structures to employ, the sort of costs involved and most crucially, measuring effectiveness on the ground. For this very reason, the wealth industry has seen the rise of philanthropy advice, provided by people working inside existing institutions or as independent advisors and consultants. Banks, for example, see philanthropy advice as a good way to engage with clients and their descendants.

*A highly respected and prominent authority in the field is Susan Winer, chief operating officer and founder of Strategic Philanthropy, a firm headquartered in Chicago. Susan is a regular commentator for Family Wealth Report (see a previous article of hers [here](#).) Her firm works solely with high net worth and ultra-high net worth donors, and was established in 2000. In a series of articles, she is setting out some of the most important issues in philanthropy and financial advice, not just for those in North America, but around the world. The editors of this news service are delighted to share these insights and we hope they stimulate debate; readers who want to send in commentary and feedback should contact the editor at [tom.burroughes@wealthbriefing.com](mailto:tom.burroughes@wealthbriefing.com)*

It seems that the holidays combined with the end of the year, combined with recent political events in the US, and attendant possible policy changes in 2017, have contributed to a greater focus on philanthropy. There are a number of things you, as a trusted advisor, can do to help your clients navigate their charitable giving before year end. Here are just a few suggestions you can make while talking with your clients.

Suggest they revisit their estate plan and ensure there is clarity about intended charitable gifts.

- Is how they would like to be remembered?
- Is this the legacy they want to leave?
- Is this the amount they still want to give?
- Have their financial parameters and interests changed over the past year or so?
- Are there clear terms and direction for successors and trustees regarding the administration and protection of their charitable legacy?
- Do they have a Charitable Distribution Advisor™ who can help trustees and successors track and review and adjust their charitable gifts?
- Is their family foundation in place, if so when was the last time they looked at whether or not it was as effective as it could be?
- When was the last time they thought about accelerating their giving so that they could make a difference in real time?
- Is the foundation set up in perpetuity? If so, perhaps it is time to consider a sunset.

- Is the foundation giving away only the mandatory 5%? Could this be increased so there are more funds available for distribution?
- Is there a formal process for grantmaking in place?
- Who makes the decisions about charitable distributions?
- Is it time to involve the next generation and integrate their passions? How will this be done?
- Are they up to date on tax and legal filings...are their 990s in order?

Given possible changes in tax law and the way in which charitable gifts may be handled in 2017, suggest that clients revisit and review their charitable giving plan.

- Should they consider making larger gifts in 2016 offsetting what they might have given in 2017.
- Is it time to do some due diligence to determine if the organizations they are giving to are still aligned with your original intent?
- Are there new opportunities that might have even greater impact if they were to support them?
- Should they consolidate their funding to achieve greater impact in a few organizations, rather than a small amount to a number of organizations?

Explore non-cash asset opportunities. Is there a better use...a charitable opportunity...for land, art or securities that they may own? Are there tax advantages that should be considered?

Is the client interested in issues outside the US? Help demystify international giving. Consider introducing clients to grantmaking intermediaries such as Global Greengrants, The Global Fund for Women, IDEX or American Jewish World Service (AJWS), among others.

Discuss aligning their financial investment portfolio with their charitable investment portfolio and looking at integrating SRI and ESG strategies that mirror their mission and potentially more rapidly and effectively advance their interests.

Consider introducing clients to a philanthropic professional to facilitate a review of their charitable gifts, help them develop a 2017 strategy, learn more about the various tools in the philanthropic toolbox and how to blend their philanthropy for maximum impact and to better understand integrating lifetime and legacy giving. (Note: Fidelity Charitable is entirely separate from Fidelity, the US fund management group.)