

# CHARITABLE GIVING IN MASS MEDIA

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Opinions and Insights

**INTERVIEWS WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS**

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# THE STAKEHOLDERS

Thirteen semi-structured interviews were conducted between September 12, 2019 and October 22, 2019 with key leaders in academia, philanthropy, and the media and entertainment industries. All have strong professional connections to the topic of charitable giving and/or developing agenda-setting narratives for prosocial impact. Interviews ran between 20-45 minutes and broadly addressed how charity, philanthropy, giving, volunteerism and other associated themes are depicted on U.S. television, both in broadcast and other streamed media, as it appears in scripted and non-scripted content and broadcast news. This report presents a summary of the interviews and their findings, with direct quotes providing the supporting narrative and recommendations. Interview questions and transcriptions of the interviews can be found in the appendices.

## **MEDIA/ENTERTAINMENT**

**David Ambroz**, Executive Director, Corporate Social Responsibility and Internal Communications, Walt Disney Television

**Tony Foleno**, Senior Vice President, Strategy and Evaluation, The Advertising Council

**Kathy Le Backes**, Vice President of Development and Research/Producer, Wise Entertainment

**Vince Stehle**, Director, Media Impact Funders; formerly writer at the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*

## **PHILANTHROPY**

**Asha Curan**, CEO, GivingTuesday

**Kate Davies**, Senior Program Officer, Global Policy and Advocacy, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

**Rick Scott**, Senior Vice President, Comic Relief USA/Red Nose Day USA

**Benjamin Soskis**, Research Associate, Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy at the Urban Institute

**Marshall Stowell**, Vice President of Communication, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation

**Cailin Wyatt**, Communications Manager, Gates Ventures

## **ACADEMIA**

**Una Osili**, Associate Dean for Research and International Programs; Professor of Economics and Philanthropic Studies; Dean's Fellow, Mays Family Institute on Diverse Philanthropy, Indiana University

**Alison Trope**, Clinical Professor, Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, USC

**Ernest Wilson**, Professor of Communication and Political Science; Former USC Annenberg Dean; Founder, Center for Third Space Thinking

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*“There’s a fundamental misunderstanding that generosity is an end in itself...it can be an end in itself. There’s a lot to be celebrated about a single generous act. But it is also a means to an end in the sense that generosity is a value that leads to other positive, prosocial behavior.” — Asha Curran*

A clear consensus emerged among those interviewed that by and large U.S. media do an inadequate job depicting philanthropy, acts of charity and generosity and other related subject matter on television. Media contribute to many misconceptions about the philanthropic community affecting understanding of both the organizations that work to fund important causes as well as the recipients of those charities. Overall, interviewees believed the media could reframe stories about charitable giving and expand its coverage. They described the role of celebrity influencers as complex, since they can engage hard-to-reach audiences, but there is a potential for backlash if they are not properly matched to a cause. Different age demographics also relate to the topic of philanthropy in different ways, and younger generations are being unaddressed by mainstream philanthropic communications efforts. Several stakeholders mentioned the need to tie charity into larger moral societal themes — such as building communities of empathy and generosity. This report summarizes the themes addressed in the interviews, and draws up a number of conclusions. The report ends with a series of recommendations based on these conversations.

## Media Coverage of Charitable Organizations and Issues

- There is a dearth of charitable giving and philanthropy-related depictions on narrative television. Where they do exist is predominately in broadcast news programming, usually aired as part of a human interest/features profile, but they often provide a cursory understanding of the issues.
- The volume of charitable giving messages fluctuate with the seasons (increasing towards the end of the year) and/or are tied to a specific event (i.e., disaster relief). Public service announcements and telethons were the most-referenced examples.
- On broadcast news, large gift announcements or stories of extreme giving (i.e., donating their last dollar, giving a kidney to a stranger) make headlines. Broadcast news exaggerates narrative paradigms: they either feature stories of the “selfless martyr” or ultra-generous donor; or they spotlight corruption and charity malfeasance. Television news highlights “poverty porn,” which otherizes and tokenizes the beneficiaries of charity.
- The same can be true in unscripted TV, which tends to emphasize the “spectacle” of giving.

- In scripted television, charity becomes a dramatic tool to define wealth or the moral code of a character. Philanthropy is villainized as a tool for the rich to display wealth; or in turn the charity becomes implicated in corruption by affiliation.
- In most genres, there is a bifurcation of the issues. Depictions separate the haves from the have-nots. The issues get framed by those with influence or wealth. Storytellers and journalists seldom give the recipients of charity the place or opportunity to tell their own story and frame the issue from their perspectives.

## **Public Perceptions of Charitable Organizations**

- There is a general lack of public trust in most large charitable organizations. A lack of transparency or a misunderstanding regarding the needs for administrative costs and overhead create suspicion among potential donors.
- The public feels helpless to resolve serious issues through small donations. When multi-million-dollar donors are highlighted in the media, it validates the belief that philanthropy is a responsibility of the wealthy.
- Younger demographics (Generations Y and Z) tend to be overlooked by big charity. These demographics funnel donations through peer-to-peer giving platforms (Kiva, GoFundMe, Facebook Fundraising).
- There is a consistent mistrust of the news media that makes it an imperfect amplifier of any positive messages on philanthropy.

## **Celebrities in the Philanthropic Space**

- Celebrity voices can garner attention to a particular problem. But their involvement must be sincere. An authentic “C-list” celebrity can do more to support a cause than an “A-list” name who is not well-versed in the issue.
- Social media is the most effective tool for connecting givers to a cause through a celebrity endorsement.

## **Recommendations from Stakeholders**

- Normalize giving. Focus on the “long game” in storytelling. Rather than a one-off story, look at the issue over multiple episodes and show the impact that giving dollars or time can make. Most charity depictions begin with the act of giving, and not the decision-making process in

determining why and what cause to support. Tell stories that depict the impact that money and time can make on an individual's life.

- Broadcast news should change focus to “solutions journalism,” which includes solutions to problems, and not just the problems themselves.
- There is a disconnect between philanthropy and the concept of generosity. Programming should help develop a culture of generosity, rather than focus strictly on philanthropic giving. Emphasize the individual's place within the larger community; reiterate the need to care for others.
- Emotional storytelling can be most effective.
- Localize the issue. Even global problems can be reframed to emphasize the impact on local communities.
- Give space to those receiving the charity; allow them to tell their own story. Do not limit storytellers to those with wealth and power.

Insights from the stakeholder interviews will inform forthcoming research activities, including two content analyses (a month-long snapshot of current TV depictions and a 10-year retrospective analysis of scripted TV and film) and a public opinion survey.

# DEPICTIONS OF CHARITABLE GIVING ON U.S. TELEVISION

*“People have a superficial understanding of philanthropy and I don’t think we have advanced the understanding in the public’s mind about what it means and how to be a part of it.” —David Ambroz*

There is a general agreement that existing depictions of charitable giving (and by extension themes that include generosity, empathy and volunteerism) are inadequate, simplified, and do not address the complexities and nuances of philanthropy nor the causes it supports. All interviewees had difficulties coming up with concrete examples of this topic depicted on U.S. television. In some instances, stakeholders cited non-scripted television programming. The most often mentioned were *“The Ellen DeGeneres Show”* and Oprah Winfrey’s programming. *“With Ellen, in particular, it is just always a part of her brand,”* says Kathy Le Backes. For Asha Curran, who has worked to include #GivingTuesday messages into Ellen Degeneres’s daytime program, *“I don’t mean this to sound critical. I’m really grateful when big TV stars engage with GivingTuesday. But it’s very much still the same narrative about giving, which is like... ‘Look at this amazing act of charity’ kind of thing.”* Other unscripted television cited by stakeholders included *Real Housewives* and *Keeping up with the Kardashians*. Built into their episodes are visits to soup kitchens or other community service efforts.

Stakeholders frequently mentioned that broadcast news gives philanthropic topics more space. Tony Foleno theorized the country’s contentious political climate was forcing news broadcasters to increase their “feel good” content by padding their programming with features about charity. Cited were profile puff pieces highlighting an individual doing work in a particular area. A few stakeholders agreed that the coverage was generally superficial and did not delve deep into an issue or cause. With disaster relief, for example, Una Osili complained about the lack of the “long game” in covering relief efforts. *“Once the disaster has passed, families may still be affected or hurting, but there’s not a television crew coming around 10 years later to see how are they doing. It seems like once the disaster’s passed the interest kind of waned.”* Osili added that charitable appeals are seasonal and increase towards the end of the year. Also cited by stakeholders as examples were telethons and public service action campaigns — i.e., Major League Baseball’s “Think Pink” campaign for breast cancer awareness. But as Alison Trope pointed out: *“It’s not*

*necessarily a giving strategy that is part of your regular life. It's part of an affiliation with an event or maybe an attachment to a particular cause that is fleeting because of something you're watching."*

A significant problem with the broadcast news narratives on charity is that they tend to exaggerate two opposing paradigms — news profiles of large-gift announcements or extreme generosity are juxtaposed against investigative pieces focusing on charity malfeasance. Benjamin Soskis referred to it as the “Madonna/Whore” dilemma. *“You’re either celebrating some selfless martyr who is giving absolutely in some kind of heroic way or you’re uncovering some kind of corruption... And those are two narrative models are really easy, but they leave out 95 percent, maybe even more, of what actual charitable giving and philanthropic experience entails.”*

Marshall Stowell says that public narratives and policies on charitable giving were shaped by the large-scale international charity efforts of the 1980s (like Band Aid and We Are The World) that used, as he described, exploitative imagery to elicit emotional responses from audiences. What ensued was a tendency to “otherize” the recipients of charity. *“Charity often relegates the imagery and storytelling to tokenism, or to otherness or that simple representation of ‘I’m no more than my circumstances or problems or disease.’”* Vince Stehle agrees: *“I think one of the problematic ways of using philanthropy is the ‘poverty porn’ of ‘we’re going to take a poor family... and we’re going to give them a house, but we are going to extract their emotional pains and joys of their lives. We’re going to exploit them as the emotional byproduct of our contribution to improve their lives.’”*

Several stakeholders who discussed depictions of charity on scripted television described its use as a plot device, as a way to define the moral code of the character. For Ernest Wilson, *Downton Abbey* uses charity as a method to identify those characters with prosocial qualities — characters who feed the poor or nurse the sick, for example. Other stakeholders referenced HBO’s *Succession* and *Silicon Valley* or Showtime’s *Billions*. In these instances, charity is used as thematic subtext to identify characters with wealth, power and influence. Charity is framed as *“a rich people thing,”* Curran said, an institution of the wealthy, with characters featured in scenes of charity galas and on philanthropic boards. As Stehle explains, charity in these instances are *“more examples of how wealthy people use philanthropy for their own advantage, which is a growing critique of philanthropy, that it is an instrument of their privilege and an extension of their power, and not an authentically altruistic act.”*

*“People think that they’re not responsible for this,”* adds Backes, *“that larger corporations, big pharma, or rich people should be the ones who are contributing to this not me.”*



Another critique of media depictions has to do with what several stakeholders called the “bifurcation” of the topic — how it separates “haves” from “have-nots” and detaches the act of giving from the more general notion of generosity. Curran says that media narratives tend to focus on monetary donations, as opposed to other types of giving: *“There’s nothing wrong with giving money, right? I think it’s great. But it is one small sliver of how generosity is manifest, and I think that narrative definitely, definitely plays out in media as well.”* Along these lines, depictions highlight the transactional aspects of charitable giving. Stakeholders hoped the media would explore the more nuanced process of becoming a donor: What causes are important to the donor? How do they search out a charity that aligns with that mission? *“If you think about media portrayals, the vast majority of portrayals I can think of don’t actually involve the act of thinking about charity. They kick in once the decision about funding is already made,”* Soskis says.

Osili thinks that explaining this process could provide a deeper understanding and connection to the charity. *“Wouldn’t it be great to actually go deeper to learn more about why they’re involved in those causes, how they feel like the organizations are making a difference?”* Osili says.

Rick Scott says that many solicitations in the media play more on our sympathy and feelings of guilt. *“There’s still some very old school thinking of, ‘this is a really bad situation or here’s the person that doesn’t look like you that isn’t doing very well. So wouldn’t you like to help?’...I see examples of things that I’m not really comfortable watching.”* Stowell wishes that media makers would give the beneficiaries of charity the opportunity to present their own situation and frame their own circumstances. *“I don’t think we are often enough allowing people first person to share their experiences in a way that means something to them, not in a way that means something to us.”* Those who frame the stories are typically those with influence. *“People with wealth and power are making decisions for people with none,”* Stowell says.

*“That is the real challenge,”* Scott adds. *“when you want to show the real story as opposed to somebody talking about the story.”*

However, the two stakeholders who had direct content creation experience were apprehensive about asking writers to increase depictions of charitable giving. Backes, for example, lamented the challenges for writers to make such storylines interesting. *“How can you make that exciting? How can you make that dramatic?...If you want to show that your character is a kind and giving person on TV, there are so many other ways to do that than having them go volunteer somewhere or donate a percentage of their salary.”*

*“Those are the challenges in the scripted space. Not to say that it can’t be done, but I think that is why we don’t see it.”*

Ambroz agrees, especially when it comes to working with television writers: *“There is a natural resistance [from them], like your mother telling you to eat your veggies.”*

# PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS

*“I think the public’s misunderstanding of charitable giving is really just that no one, apart from an estate lawyer, could really be expected to understand how it all fits together. So, it’s not like it’s a failing on the part of the general public to not understand something that they could never be expected to understand.” — Vince Stehle*

Most stakeholders believe that the public’s misunderstanding about charitable organizations create an atmosphere of distrust that over the years has reduced the amount of monetary donations at the individual level. Curran says that while “big philanthropy” (corporate giving/large-money donations) remains steady, individual giving at the smaller dollar levels is decreasing. Stakeholders agreed it was a lack of transparency on the part of the charities and a feeling of a lack of control by potential donors that decreases funding. Trope says: *“I don’t have any control of my money after [I give]. I think that is one thing that probably keeps people from giving... There’s a lot of frankly warranted skepticism around how you can trace the money. There’s not a lot of transparency in these organizations that show you exactly where your money is going.”*

Trope mentions her work raising money for Avon’s annual “Fight Against Breast Cancer” walk. *“I had breast cancer...and actually raised a ton of money...I felt proud but then I also felt very conflicted because I had no idea how much of that money was going back into the walk itself or into Avon’s coffers...I didn’t know how much of it was actually going toward research and what kind of research.”* Stehl sees this as confusion about “resource flows” in nonprofit organizations: *“I think the basic misunderstanding is that nobody can be expected to understand the complexity of it. It’s a pretty complex system.”*

Foleno says the questions of overhead only emerged a few years ago. Today, *“there’s lots more questions about, ‘is my money going to the right place?’ ‘Are they stealing it?’ There’s less than a degree of trust,”* he says.

Ambroz wishes we could debunk the myth that charities with more than 15% overhead are mismanaged: *“If you’re paying for a generator, is that considered overhead? Is that a vital part of your organizational operation?”* Soskis believes this emanated from a few high-profile cases of financial mismanagement in charities but does not reflect the majority of philanthropies *“that are on*

*shoestring operations and are desperate for more funding... I don't think there's a good sense by most people of how under-financed and funded most charities are."*

Cailin Wyatt thinks the lack of transparency extends to ways in which one can become involved with a charity or issue. *"It's not super clear how to get involved, besides writing a check. If they want to be more heavily involved in participating with the organization or volunteering...I think it's harder for people to really see the path for them to get involved."*

The public too feels powerless in tackling large-scale problems with small dollar donations. *"We see problems as so monolithic and huge that we can't even see how our \$5 or \$10 or whatever we can afford to give will possibly make a difference in the trajectory of cancer, for example,"* Trope says. Backes agrees, adding to this: *"It's very difficult for people to make the connection that their tiny donation can help with...huge, huge unattainable issues [like cancer]...I think that's a big, big, big thing."*

From a demographics perspective, philanthropies have an inherent misunderstanding of Generations Y and Z and their relationship to giving. *"There tends to be an impression in the sector that millennials and younger people give less and therefore they extrapolate care less,"* Curran says. According to Soskis, giving rates for younger generations are less than older ones. But it is not necessarily that they are less generous than their predecessors. According to Curran, *"older generations have basically screwed them. There's huge income inequality. Like they just don't have the money to give. That has nothing to do with how much they care about issues... They're very social justice oriented. They care about the environment, they care about their communities."* Their charity manifests in other ways — i.e., resources of time and non-monetary donations. Millennials in particular want to work with purpose, and want to have meaning in their personal and professional lives, explains Foleno. *"Even though they have less money than their older peers, they tend to care more. They also are not so thrilled with a traditional form of philanthropy."*

Because of these false impressions, nonprofits do not engage with younger people in a way that encourages philanthropic giving. *"Then that creates a cycle where they're getting fewer donations from these people and then they're saying that those people are even more ungenerous,"* Curran says.

Younger generations are more apt to take to crowdfunding platforms, which are transforming their giving experience (stakeholders mentioned Kiva, GoFundMe and Facebook Fundraising). Soskis says that these peer-to-peer platforms require a "compelling" story — a photo of a cute kid or a

dramatic narrative to rise above the online fray. *“There’s clear evidence that the people who have the best stories get funded,”* Soskis says. *“There is drama, a kind of performative element.”* Kate Davies says that the public nature of crowdsourced fundraising is making philanthropy less of a private endeavor. *“When we know other people are giving money too we’re more likely to give more as well because we feel that there’s a collective pot that’s growing.”*

But Ambroz is quick to add that giving through online platforms like GoFundMe also come with implicit misconceptions: *“GoFundMe is a belief that it is charitable and it is not charitable. Even if it is, when people accept gifts of \$50,000 they have to pay taxes. The tools at our disposal and the level of understanding are not up to the task.”*

Foleno says that the cultural zeitgeist leans toward a distrust of large institutions. *“There’s just universal anger and distress in this country,”* he says. Adding that *“charities still make out better than, say, Congress, or the news media or business.”*

# CELEBRITIES IN THE PHILANTHROPIC SPACE

*“How do you ensure that that celebrity as a spokesperson is not just a poster boy that flies in for the moment and tells a story and then leaves?” — Rick Scott*

Opinions were mixed on the effectiveness of the celebrity endorsement in philanthropy. But the general consensus was that the impact of the celebrity participant depended on if the public perceives the celebrity as knowledgeable about the issue and authentic in his/her concern. Outside of Ellen Degeneres and Oprah Winfrey, stakeholders mentioned Leonard DiCaprio, Angelina Jolie, Jack Black, Viola Davis and Bono as examples of positive and effective celebrity involvement in a cause.

Though these names are considered “A-List,” Stowell, who has done extensive work in strategic communications using celebrity endorsers, says the level of fame does not matter so much as the ability of that spokesperson to make a compelling case and push a cause forward. *“I used to say, I would much rather have a C-list celebrity that’s educated on the issue and willing to actually work at it, than an A-list celebrity that wants to drop in for a PR moment.”*

Trope explains the history and complexity of the relationship between the cause, the celebrity and the audience. Dating to the time of Mary Pickford, studios encouraged their stars to “give back,” realizing the value of the star’s off-screen persona. *“Actors were seen as less than, they were told that giving was a way to legitimate themselves. I think that that’s, to some degree, true to this day.”* Backes says that celebrities may use it to build a brand of social responsibility, but as long as you are able to bring attention to an issue, it can be a win-win. The Kardashian clan, for example, has shone a light on several issues, including criminal justice reform, that has resulted in a real-world shift in understanding. *“Is it just for image? I don’t know. But at the same time I still have questions. It’s still a good thing to show though, right? That they aren’t just totally vapid people, that they are using their fame and wealth for good. So I can’t 100 percent knock it.”*

Osili says that effective endorsements come from *“people who really talk about things that resonated with them because it was an experience they had as a child or something that affected their family. And they bring awareness to an issue that people don’t know much about. It involves not just superficial images, but going a few levels below that.”*

Wyatt agrees that celebrities can reach audiences that other media messaging cannot.

*“[Audiences] are able to understand it in a way that's really accessible to them through a celebrity versus reading a news story that they might not identify with. But they are much more able to relate to a human that they feel like they know in some way. That has a huge influence.”*

However, Stowell has seen partnerships backfire. In one instance, a “*well-intentioned, very dedicated*” celebrity with a personal connection to the issue was perceived as insincere and was belittled by one media outlet as, “*white woman goes to Africa.*” Osili recalls an incident with Lin-Manuel Miranda in his efforts to support hurricane relief in Puerto Rico. “*I think there's more criticism of philanthropy than there was in the past. It's not as simple as celebrities showing up at a food drive to serve meals or even...cleanup their city. There is a need to show a deeper engagement. The public is more sophisticated and more demanding.*” Foleno adds, “*the whole thing can blow up in a second in a bad way... You can give them a briefing, you can give them a script, you give them anything you want. They're going to be themselves.*”

Scott says that effective endorsements can happen but require much preparation in strengthening familiarity between celebrity and cause. Speaking of his experience at Comic Relief/Red Nose Day USA, he says: “*A lot of our time was spent taking them to see projects where we didn't film them, to go and see work ...and meet some people whose lives had been changed so that when they were actually filmed, they owned their own story and it was authentic.*” He shares an example of the actor Milo Ventimiglia's trip with Red Nose Day to visit health clinics in Kenya. It was, he says, “*the best thing we could've hoped for.*”

Scott explains: “*He made an impactful film. He then told the story. He then came back and he went on talk shows...We didn't have to script him. He could tell his own story. He said it in a respectful way about what he saw. That's the best scenario...where somebody is moved, they care about it, they understand it, they can articulate it and then...they have their own story to tell.*”

When celebrity involvement is more intentional than “*trotting people through a desperate situation on Instagram,*” Stowell says, it has the power and effect to “*open doors that otherwise wouldn't be open, and create some type of sustained pressure to get things changed.*”

“*The celebrity piece is complicated. I don't think we've found a new model for it...it's still a bit of a People magazine spread on what so-and-so is doing in their spare time,*” Stowell adds.

Social media is an effective tool for both celebrities and other influencer-type personalities to communicate messages of philanthropy. Curran says, “*social media is far ahead of other media, I*

would say...bring[ing] the conversation about giving and generosity into the public square.” Backes agrees “these feel-good stories...they’re just so easy to disseminate on social media.” Scott says that younger generations reject appointment television and social media messaging is critical to reaching younger audiences.

But Ambroz cautions that celebrity-driven endorsements, specifically through social media, is a “you-centric” approach to messaging and “an ego-based approach to charitable giving” divorcing it from altruism. “It can tend to belittle the complicated nature of the issues it deals with.”



# RECOMMENDATIONS FROM STAKEHOLDERS

*“There are ways of communicating some of these issues differently where we’re building the brand of the sector...building something bigger that then becomes systemic change. It’s more about building a new normal.” — Kate Davies*

Across the board, interview subjects agreed that a shift in media messaging could have a profound influence on real-world attitudes and behaviors regarding philanthropic giving. *“If I didn’t believe that media could have an impact in a whole variety of ways having to do with the social good, I wouldn’t be working with the Ad Council,” Foleno says. “I wouldn’t be seeing the results that I do... Media can actually take you at least part of the way there. In what we say a lot at Ad Council, “the last mile.”*

## Normalize Giving

One of the more frequent recommendations from stakeholders was to normalize giving on television, modeling it through characters and in storylines. *“Where you really see a kind of normalized social norms view of giving is I think quite rare or quite few and far between,” Davies says. And an intentional effort to integrate philanthropy into scenes of everyday life can be so easy, Ambroz explains: “Show recycling, don’t show balloon releases, show people taking stairs. Normalize these simple behaviors...Simplify it. Don’t go for perfect. Go for things that are hugely impactful.” Role model what the activity looks like, Backes adds: “We’re seeing people who look like me are doing it, and they’re doing it in all these different ways...the opportunities are to demonstrate, to role model, what all those ways look like.” It should go beyond financial contributions, she adds. “It could be like donating to Goodwill, or whatever, you know? Didn’t the Marie Kondo show increase crazy amounts of Goodwill and Salvation Army giving?”*

Part of normalizing giving is to better illuminate the process by which someone participates in a philanthropic activity. *“We are so conditioned to have that kind of instant gratification in so many instances that I think that’s a big challenge for charitable giving,” Backes adds. Narratives could and should emphasize the “long game” in telling these stories. As Soskis says, “Instead of starting the story when the person gives the check to the charity, rewinding and thinking, ‘well, why did you favor a cancer charity over say funding diabetes or public schools?’” Beyond that, storytellers should develop a long-term strategy of taking viewers through the crisis or concern to the*

outcome. Trope says a possible strategy is to continue a story arc over several episodes or a season: *"It wouldn't be a single episode, but to show over time how that impacts a particular character or how that impacts a particular institution."*

## **Adopt Solutions Journalism**

Storytelling without the statistics to back it up could be dangerous and misleading, Osili says. *"We need the storytelling and we also need the data piece."* Soskis advocates solutions journalism, or the reporting strategy that includes solutions to problems rather than just the problems themselves. This would require giving more broadcast time and space to the subject matter: *"It's a long tradition of news to have the feel good story be short, 'here's a kid who's giving his money from a lemonade stand to fight cancer'...it's an important story, but it is really hard to fit this kind of solutions-based journalism into a soundbite."*

*"Solutions journalism is not PR,"* Stehle adds. *"And it's not just Pollyanna putting a positive spin on whatever story. But rather, looking in those hard places where there are challenges and there are successes and failures. You're looking for the upside...that is an area where I think there's a tendency to recognize the value of nonprofits and foundations and the charitable sector in achieving those solutions."*

## **Depict generosity**

Curran believes the narrative should extend beyond charity to overarching themes of generosity, empathy and community. *"Somebody getting out a checkbook and writing a check to the same nonprofit...that view of giving is kind of... uninspiring,"* Curran says. *"So if I asked you, 'tell me about the most generous person you know'...I guarantee you wouldn't be telling me about somebody who you know who writes the largest checks to nonprofits."*

*"Giving as an action is divorced from generosity as a value, which is not true of all other cultures, but very true of American culture,"* she adds.

Trope believes that effective messaging takes into account one's place within the larger community: *"It's really about thinking outside of yourself and outside of your own family unit and being able to see yourself as part of something larger, part of a larger community...I think that's also what has to be embedded in the narratives is, 'how do you situate yourself in a broader community?'"*

Wilson believes that messaging should be more about building emotional competence: *"If I were Gates, and I were trying to figure out how to promote [charitable giving], how would I do it?,"* he

says. *"I would lead a campaign that would broadly address some of these issues that I'm concerned about—empathy and cultural competence, cultural awareness, mutual understanding."*

*"Generosity as a value is more likely to lead to other forms of civic engagement," Curran says. "It's more likely to lead to empathy...because once you've given to somebody, you're more likely to see them exhibiting human characteristics like you do."* Osili backs this up with research, correlating higher empathy scores with those who tend to give more to charity. *"There's something called 'principal of care,' [people] who feel strongly that it's important to take care of others, and those who have more should give to those who have less."*

Osili adds, *"giving tends to be correlated with other prosocial behavior."*

## **Focus on emotional storytelling**

Foleno was the greatest proponent of emotional storytelling to produce behavior change regarding charitable giving. *"I always say the most important part of any media campaign is the emotional piece. Never a rational appeal. Emotion trumps reason every time and you need to move people's hearts before they actually think to consider any action. So that applies to TV or anything,"* he says. Backes agrees that finding an emotional hook is an effective device. In her work with Stand Up To Cancer, the organization often connected emotionally with their audience. *"One of the reasons why our campaigns were so successful was because we were sharing real people's stories that audiences connected with emotionally. When you can make that kind of connection, the message of charitable giving is most impactful."*

## **Localize the issue**

Backes laments that Americans tend to be myopic in their concerns. *"I think that is a huge challenge, most people are only...thinking very local."* Wilson learned in his work in international development that framing the story of an international crisis to show immediate and local impact was an effective method to spark concern. *"People would say, 'Why should people give money to international programs when people are starving in downtown Washington D.C. and San Francisco and Philadelphia?'"*

*"There was a tug of war between the humanitarian issue and what was good for themselves. We would say that the humanitarian crisis would lead to local warfare, which in turn might lead to Americans getting drawn into that."*

## **Change the perspective**

Stowell emphasizes that narratives on issues like homelessness are typically framed by writers who are unfamiliar with the crisis. His hope is that storywriters will begin to give others the space to tell their own stories. *“Allow people to tell their stories first person...Not painting people only as their circumstances, but allowing them to complete the sentence and talk about the changes that need to be made, given their vast experiences.”*

In his capacity developing media messaging through Comic Relief/Red Nose Day USA, Scott tries to depict the recipients of charity as individuals deserving of respect. *“We show them with integrity and we show them with transparency...adults making decision and taking control of themselves.”* He adds: *“How do you tell the stories about real children that are living in poverty without making them vulnerable?”*

Listening is crucial for writers, says Curran. *“I think the word storytelling is complicated. We often tell partners to do more story listening than storytelling. So even the word storytelling does kind of imply a one-way conversation. I would prefer to use engagement...Engagement can also mean, we start a real authentic conversation about an issue and the ways that we can all take part in becoming impactful in it.”*