



WINGSForum Philanthropy and the Digital Revolution

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Workshops highlights

WINGSForum is the preeminent global conference on philanthropy - offering a rare opportunity for a truly unique collection of philanthropy associations, support organisations, funders and academics from all regions of the world to network, learn from each other and deeply explore how philanthropy can make an ever-greater contribution to social impact and civil society building.

The in-person WINGSForum had to be postponed, and a series of virtual experiences is filling the gap. As part of this online series, on 18 February 2021 we welcomed a group of thought leaders to discuss and debate the role of philanthropy in the digital revolution. This event was followed by exclusive workshops for WINGS members, and key highlights from these can be found below.

KEY THEMES AND IDEAS

WHERE TO START?

There are many layers to the issue and philanthropy hasn't traditionally prioritised work in this area. However, digital technology not only needs to serve civil society, but civil society needs to take an active role in the continued digital transformation we see around us - even if we don't currently have all the answers. The Covid-19 crisis has pushed many organisations to reframe their relationship with digital technologies, but it has also laid bare the vast inequities faced by many people around the world and their ability to take part in the 'digital revolution'. For many working in philanthropy, knowing where to start to include a digital focus can feel overwhelming. We hope this is the start of more conversations about philanthropy and the digital revolution, and that WINGS can continue to support your work here going forward.

Technological benefits from the past year philanthropic organisations are keen to retain

a. Efficiency

- Moving operations to remote working is often cheaper and quicker, as is organising events.
- More focused and productive meetings.
- Delivering activities can be done online.

b. Democratisation and accessibility

- Organisations can build their teams from a wider range of talent.
- There is now the ability to jump into meetings anywhere in the world, transforming external relations.
- Learning opportunities for more members of staff as events are more accessible.
- Capacity for more connections between sectors due to the convenience of online meetings.
- More inclusion of those who are mobility impaired.
- Employees can work from anywhere, and without expensive urban rent prices.

b. The downsides to the digitisation during the pandemic

- Face to face interaction cannot be replaced online with the same degree of empathy and connection that feels necessary in some kinds of work.
- Work has become about work, but you miss out on the chance to make deeper connections with colleagues.
- Remote working can be lonely.
- Digital poverty:
 - There is a physical cost of hardware and software.
 - We are still contending with many basic issues of connectivity.
 - Cultural and generational divides can impact a person's comfort using technology.
- Online, you can avoid more uncomfortable but necessary conversations that involve going into other communities and cultures.
- Remote working better suits some people, depending on personality, environment, and household members.
- Online meetings don't work as well for brainstorming, ideation, or debating within teams.

c. Changes in the wider ecosystem

- There has been a rise in giving using digital platforms.
- More organisations in the social field are realising they need to work with digital technology in a more coherent and conscious way .
- It has shown the adaptability, and often the creativity, of many civil society organisations.
- Mass giving through technology is how we might build the next generation of philanthropists.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PHILANTHROPY - AND POTENTIAL PITFALLS TO KEEP IN MIND**a. Fund in new ways and new initiatives**

- Funding digital infrastructure is imperative and severely underfunded around the world.
- Traditional institutional philanthropy might be a partner on some of these big issues, but should not expect to provide the answer - we need to support research into where limited philanthropic resources can leverage public funds.
- Consider how philanthropy can apply approaches to helping alleviate poverty with the more recent problem of digital poverty.
- Institutional philanthropy should encourage digital giving rather than fear it, although some countries are much further behind here.

b. Model best practice

- The philanthropic sector needs to be prepared to answer questions about their own digital practices.
- Explore supporting open source and creative commons movements that help democratise access to technology.
- Take the time to learn themselves - you can't preach digital infrastructure without having one yourself - learn about the models out there that help us understand this work.
- The potential for collective intelligence gained through data generated from shared tools and processes is incredible if we can use it to support the digitalisation of our sector.
- By learning more about digital, we can rely less on third parties to be the experts.
- Rather than trying to convert analogue ways into digital, try to start thinking from the digital perspective first.
- Ensure work in digital sustains beyond being a trending topic for philanthropy.

c. Work across sectors

- Look into replicating scientific research practices for digital in the philanthropy field.
- View these problems as part of a system and connect them to the public sector and corporate sector, as well as our own.

d. Data and consent

- Challenge how we utilise data in the sector and educate organisations on what data they have and which measures they should take to handle it.
- We have the data on underserved communities, and the power to use this for their benefit, but we need to understand our moral and ethical bias toward data ownership.
- Have a clear approach to data collection and the corresponding consent for this.
- Build data competencies into programme design and impact measurement.

**NEXT STEPS**

There are a few clear insecurities of philanthropic organisations in this space, as we learned in the plenary session and these workshops. Over the coming months, WINGS will build out a learning agenda using this information. We hope to offer our network workshops, blog posts, and other learning opportunities on digital strategies, best practices, and the relationship between data and philanthropy.

We hope that this work will enable WINGS to continue to build strong philanthropic ecosystems around the world, which incorporate the rapidly changing digital landscape. Keep in touch with us by [subscribing](#) for updates.

The WINGSForum will continue to be a space to hold these kinds of challenging conversations. Find out more about our online and in-person events by visiting the [WINGSForum website](#) (wingsforum.org).

