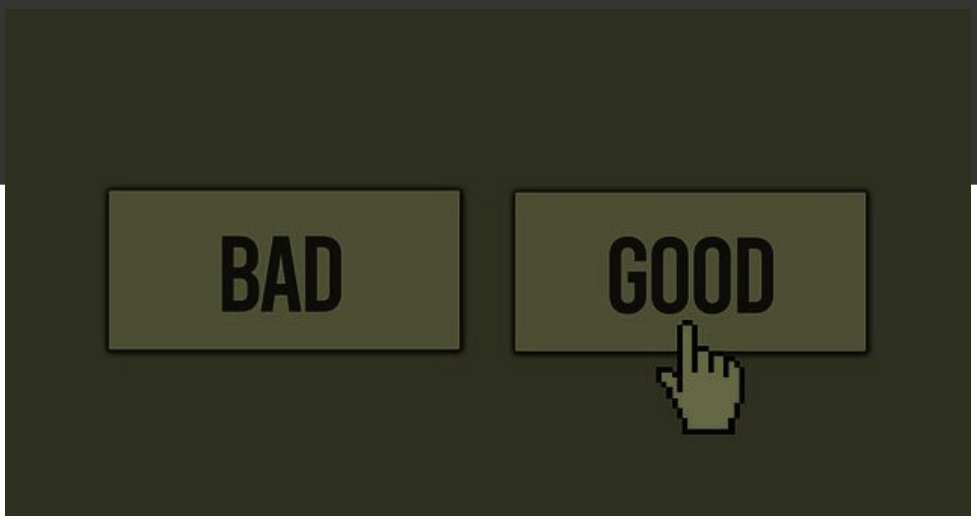
GENERAL

# 2022 FPLG Favorite Posts: Part Two

01.05.23 | Linda J. Rosenthal, JD




The year just ended was not the calm after the storm that most of us had wanted.

Showers lingered amid partly cloudy skies; there were also sudden, drenching downpours as well as ominous claps of loud thunder. In those twelve months, we coped with the remnants of COVID-19 against the backdrop of many unresolved societal problems predating the pandemic emergency.

Now, in the New Year's first week, we at For Purpose Law Group continue our brief look-back at favorite blog posts of 2022.

## *Thought Leaders' Observations*

Today's recap – Part Two of the series – focuses on the big-picture observations and advice of philanthropy thought leaders who want to remain optimistic but feel obliged to raise issues that, if not addressed soon and adequately, will likely create even greater chaos and disaster.

Smack-dab in the middle of the year, we wrote *Philanthropy Thought Leaders: "Seven Scary Things"* (July 12, 2022). The image chosen was apropos: Edvard Munch's "The Scream" (1893). The post was drawn particularly from the points raised by Philip Rojc, a senior editor at *Inside Philanthropy*, in his recent article, *Seven Things That Scare Us About the Future of Philanthropy* (June 9, 2022). He posed the question: "What does the future of philanthropy look like in the United States?" and then the follow-up query: "And do we like where that road might lead?"

A few months later, we wrote *More About Scary, But Urgent, Choices for Philanthropy* (October 31, 2022). The image chosen that day was appropriately spooky for addressing additional "worrisome issues on the horizon for the nonprofit sector."

### *"Seven Scary Things"*

"We're at a crossroads,…" Philip Rojc wrote in late spring 2022. "Society's challenges are deep and urgent. There are existential choices: not way off in the future but right now."

We discussed his insights in *Philanthropy Thought Leaders: "Seven Scary Things"* (July 12, 2022). Mr. Rojc's article mirrored the focus of *Inside Philanthropy:* Their goal is tracking and reporting on nonprofit-sector grant making, including getting a sense of the big picture of who is funding what and why."

Philanthropy has traditionally shaped "how the nation's organizations address the issues of the day" with "foundation-led grantmaking." But this "New Gilded Age" of mega-funders is a different "reality: billionaire disruptors, bulging donor-advised funds, politicized funding, and forceful structural critiques."

For the current era of "intense philanthropic churn," the publication staff compiled a scary list of "… those possible outcomes that we are most concerned about regarding where philanthropy is headed next." In this article, Philip Rojc discussed each item on that list; namely:

- Billionaires doing too much
- Billionaires doing too little
- Black box (i.e., secrecy)
- Rampant politicization
- Talk instead of action
- Reforms beaten back
- Reforms politicized

It's "not an exhaustive list," he cautioned, "but it does reflect some of the key frailties of a sector that remains very much the province of the wealthy, the powerful and the well-connected — and hardly a bastion of democracy." Since "change is not only desirable but inevitable, making the right choices about which changes we pursue and which changes we fight" will be critical.

Now, at the turn of the year into 2023, this article remains important; indeed, prescient – particularly about billionaires doing too much or too little. We've had a chance to see the world's biggest billionaire in action and he's managed to create a colossal mess in just the last two months of 2022.

### *More Scary, Urgent Choices*

In *More About Scary, But Urgent, Choices for Philanthropy* (October 31, 2022), we called attention to "several additional seven-item lists to ponder." Halloween was an excellent day to consider this "fearsome food for thought."

Philip Rojc had published one more important article; see *Seven Problems That Have Defied Philanthropy* (August 23, 2022), *insidephilanthropy.com*,. There, he pointed out that philanthropy hasn't had a particularly successful track record over the years "with certain intractable problems" of society, despite tossing large amounts of money, time, and expertise at them. His newest (also non-exhaustive) list of critical issues is: (1) the opioid epidemic; (2) obesity; (3) K-12 education; (4) housing and homelessness; (5) gun violence; (6) nuclear weapons and arms control; and (7) racial inequality – education and residential stratification." These problems, of course, were here before

the pandemic, and they remain. We must recognize the failures of the same old approaches tried over and over again and somehow do better.

On October 18, 2022, Phil Buchanan, the CEO of the Center for Effective Philanthropy posted a discerning and timely article on that organization's excellent blog. In *Big Changes and 7 Big Questions for Big Philanthropy*, Mr. Buchanan presented his own "seven worries about philanthropy's future." They include, for instance: concerns about whether important grant making reforms from the past two years will be continued or not as well as questions about how well philanthropy can or will "navigate through the turbulence of our politics" and "protect our democracy." His discussion of each of seven points is insightful as always.

### *Conclusion*

In the final installment of our 2022 retrospective, we'll include several more posts from last year that we're happy to highlight once again.

*– Linda J. Rosenthal, J.D., FPLG Information & Research Director*