



Welcome to the September 2026 newsletter

Hi there philanthropoids,

Hope you are all well. I feel like I should start with a slight apology: I was reading back over some old editions of the newsletter recently and it became apparent to me that a lot of my intros do seem to be variations on a theme of “Ooh, I’m really busy/tired” and “Wow, haven’t the last few weeks gone quickly?” So I’m sorry if that gets a bit repetitive.

That being said, wow – September really did go quickly, didn’t it? But maybe that’s just because I have been so busy...

In fairness to me, the past month did include one of my kids starting secondary school and me going on a work trip to Brazil (of which more in a moment), so it has been a bit more full-on than most!

Luckily for all of us, I have also found time to keep an eye on the global philanthrosphere and squirrel away some of the juiciest morsels of news and content, so if you’ve also been a bit swamped during September, here’s your opportunity for a curated catch-up.

Rhodri

PHILANTHROPY IN THE NEWS

That's not what I meant by philanthropy reform...

This month saw reports of [not one, but two, record-breaking donations from crypto billionaires to Reform](#), the populist right-wing political party that has radically shaken up British politics in the last few years.



(Ben Delo onstage at a *Spectator* event in 2018. Image credit: [Anne Schwarz Photography](#), [CC BY-SA 4.0](#))

The first gift came from Ben Delo, the founder of crypto trading platform BitMex, who received a presidential pardon in 2025 from Donald Trump after being found guilty of a breach of US anti money laundering laws in 2022. [Delo announced that he is giving Reform £36 million](#): £1 million per month for every month between now and the latest that Labour could call the next general election in 2029 (although the gift will be given in whole up front, to avoid falling foul of any future new limitations on political donations). This is the biggest single donation ever given to a UK political party. Or at least, it was for a few days, as it was then swiftly followed by the announcement of a further £36 million from Christopher Harborne, the Thailand-based crypto billionaire who has previously given Reform a number of multi-million-pound donations.

Now some of you might be saying at this point, “hang on Rhodri, these are political donations rather than charitable ones, so this isn’t really philanthropy. Why don’t you stay in your lane?” Firstly – wow, seems a bit harsh. And secondly, although that is technically true, I think that there are a number of reasons that we do need to see this as a story about philanthropy.

The first is that Christopher Harborne has literally claimed as much, since the headline of a comment piece he wrote in the *Daily Telegraph* was: [“My donation to Reform is a philanthropic gift to this country”](#). This doesn’t seem particularly ambiguous, although it is definitely contentious. Some might argue, for instance, that his donation definitely *isn’t* philanthropy because there is a sharp distinction in UK law between donations to registered charities – which are subject to a public benefit test, regulated by the Charity Commission, and constrained by strict rules governing political activities – and donations to political parties (which are regulated differently and subject to different laws). By framing his donation to Reform as philanthropy, Harborne seems to be deliberately trying to blur these distinctions – which he is able to do by claiming that it is his *intentions* which make the gift philanthropic, rather than the legal form of the organisation he is giving to. The interesting thing about this is that in doing so Harborne may be a harbinger (or perhaps a Harborneinger?) of things to come, as there are certainly others (on both sides of the political spectrum)

who feel as though the distinction between political gifts and philanthropic ones is become increasingly artificial and untenable in a world where politics increasingly leaches into everything.

Which leads us on to another reason that this should be seen as a story about philanthropy: even if you don't believe that Delo and Harborne's gifts in this instance should be seen as philanthropy, the fact that they are giving such massive gifts to a political party raises the question of whether some or all of this money might otherwise have made its way into the traditional charitable sector. In Delo's case in particular, this seems like a distinct possibility, as he was already giving fairly significantly to a range of charitable causes – including a number that clearly relate to an interest in issues of free speech and academic freedom- so it doesn't seem like much of a stretch to suggest that his donation to Reform represents an extension of this. The question, of course – as it always is with political donations – is whether in a mental accounting sense these are seen by the donor as coming from a separate 'pot' from charitable donations, or whether an increase in the former inevitably means a decrease in the latter. If other wealthy donors start to follow Delo and Harborne's lead in giving massive gifts to political parties, will this eat into the more traditional philanthropy they might have been doing, or will the overall size of the pie increase?

The final reason that this is definitely a relevant story for this newsletter is that we still do not know what the prospect of a Reform government would mean for philanthropy and civil society in the UK. There are justifiable concerns, for instance, that the party might be tempted to adopt the same kind of antagonistic stance towards nonprofits and foundations that the Trump administration has taken in the US in its second term, or that it will follow the playbook established by various populist and authoritarian governments around the world of attacking and undermining the rights and freedoms on which civil society rests (freedom of speech, the right to protest, the right to associate freely etc). The fact that Reform's coffers have now been swelled to the tune of £72 million means that we have to take the prospect of them emerging as the next party of UK government more seriously than ever before, so thinking through these sorts of potential challenges and implications is vital

Panning the Lifeboats: Far-right attacks on the RNLI

If you want warning signs of the kinds of challenges that civil society might face under a future populist right-wing government in the UK, you didn't have to look very far this month, with further depressing news of attacks by far-right activists on the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) and its volunteers.



(Image credit: [Ojsyork](#), CC BY 4.0)

The RNLI has been a target of far-right ire for some time now, as its work has put it firmly on the front line of the vitriolic debate over 'small boats' carrying people attempting to seek refuge or asylum. This reached a new low this month, with far-right activists going beyond criticising the RNLI as an organisation, and instead targeting individual RNLI volunteers – branding them “traitors” for <checks notes> saving the lives of people who would otherwise have drowned at sea (which is – and I can't stress this enough - literally the RNLI's mission). As a result, a number of RNLI lifeboat stations either had to put in place additional measures to protect volunteers – who continued to turn up, despite the threats being levelled against them – or, [in some cases, shut temporarily](#). Things escalated even further when [a far-right activist](#)

[attacked an inflatable boat carrying migrants and rescue workers with a knife](#), deliberately slashing it before escaping on his own boat. The activist, known as Danny Tommo, has subsequently pleaded not guilty to charges of criminal damage (a plea that you would think was somewhat undermined by the fact that he videoed himself slashing the rescue boat and posted it on social media, but hey - I'm not a lawyer).

If you are looking for any sort of silver lining from this fundamentally unpleasant story, it was at least reported that [the RNLI saw a significant boost in donations following the reports of far-right intimidation](#) – as many members of the public (myself included) chose to show their solidarity and their rejection of hate-filled far right narratives by giving the charity some money.

Another well-known charity, the Royal British Legion, faced a totally different set of challenges from the far-right this month. The charity was forced to come out and [disavow a crowdfunding campaign set up in the RBL's name, and using its imagery, by a known anti-migrant group based in Hampshire called Rushmoor People First](#). There has long been a debate over the Royal British Legion's poppy appeal – in terms of whether it commemorates or glorifies warfare, and whether it results in “poppy fascism” where people are socially pressured into wearing the symbol for fear of criticism. But in an age where far-right activists have been emboldened and are deliberately stoking division around issues of national identity, the RBL – and other charities which work on similar issues – may well face new challenges.

Computer say yes: The Gates foundation invests big in AI

The Gates Foundation [announced this month that it would be putting \\$1 billion of funding towards improving access to AI tools and making them more equitable](#). The Foundation made the statement in its latest annual “Goalkeepers” report, which tracks progress against the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)



Bill Gates and Gates Foundation CEO Mark Suzman at 10 Downing St in 2024. (Image credit: [10 Downing Street](#), [Open Govt license 3.0](#))

In addition to supporting the adoption of AI tools in areas such as healthcare and education, the Gates Foundation will also be providing money for initiatives which aim to train Large Language Models LLMs on a wider range of languages – to overcome what is increasingly seen as a problematic bias towards a small handful of dominant languages within LLMs, which leads to groups and communities that don't speak these languages becoming marginalised.

At a time when there is an increasing amount of public debate about whether the development of AI needs to be slowed down or paused, the Gates Foundation's positioning is interesting. Bill Gates himself doesn't seem to think a slowdown is needed and remains enthusiastic about AI's potential to be the "greatest equalizer" the world has ever seen. (Although for balance, he has said that it also has the potential to be the "worst source of injustice" the world has ever seen. So it's very much a little from column A, and a little from column B...) And if the reality is that AI is going to play an increasingly large part in all of our lives, then ensuring it is fair and equitable, and that civil society organisations are able to access AI tools, is definitely important. If, however, the mood music on AI shifts more significantly in the future (which is definitely possible), then I wonder whether the Gates

Foundation will change tack on AI, or whether it will come to seem increasingly at odds with where wider civil society is on these issues.

A Brit More Generous: Boosting philanthropy in Britain

There was an interesting opinion piece in the Telegraph this month on "[how to boost philanthropy in Britain](#)" from Chris Smith (former Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and current Chancellor of Cambridge University). This is a subject that is very close to my own heart, as I have spent quite large parts of the last 20 years trying figure out the same thing myself - and coincidentally this month also saw the launch of a new initiative I am involved in (The Giving Record) that is very much aimed at strengthening the UK's culture of philanthropy through storytelling (more on that shortly...) – so I felt as though I should offer An Opinion.



Lord Smith of Finsbury (Image credit: [© House of Lords / photography by Roger Harris, CC BY 3.0 license](#))

In broad terms I agree with a lot of what Chris Smith suggests, although I do also feel like I have heard most of it before. (Which isn't necessarily a bad thing, as there's a lot to be said for lending your weight to

existing ideas rather than trying to come up with entirely new ones). I definitely agree with his recommendation for more match funding, since that provably works. Or at least it works in the sense that it involves the government coughing up actual money, and this tends to bring in money from private donors. Whether it has a lasting effect after the match is finished in terms of making people more likely to donate is a lot less clear. And there are also questions about what gets match funding (as it is unlikely that the government is going to match donations to any cause or charitable organisation). In many cases, the match funding ends up being aligned with particular government policy priorities, which is understandable but may raise concerns that this will have a distorting effect.

I would cautiously agree with the idea of a new King's Medal for philanthropy (modelled on the French Legion d'Honneur) as well. The existing honours system is used to reward philanthropy (and has been increasingly so in recent years), but I do think something specific and prestigious wouldn't hurt. It wouldn't appeal to all philanthropists (in fact, I know quite a few who would recoil at the idea...) but it would definitely appeal to some for whom recognition is important; and might be particularly useful in getting wealthy people who aren't already involved in philanthropy to start giving

I'm less convinced about Chris Smith's recommendation around reforming Gift Aid, however. I would agree that Gift Aid is quite complicated in some ways (unsurprisingly for a system that has evolved organically over the years, and which has been expanded to include all kinds of different things like museum entry fees, donated goods etc). But I'm not sure the evidence that switching to a straight deduction system (like the US charitable deduction) would "work better psychologically" is as clear-cut as Chris Smith suggests. Most of the research I have seen is pretty ambivalent on the question of deductions vs credit-based systems, and there is definitely a strong argument that the latter are more equitable (as they aren't subject to the 'upside-down effect', where the incentive is of higher value to those on higher incomes). It's also worth bearing in mind that take up of the US charitable deduction is now very low (last I saw, [it was about 8% of](#)

[eligible donations](#) and it may well have dropped further due to the expansion of the standard deduction).

I also know from experience that people elsewhere in the world often look admiringly at Gift Aid when thinking about how to design their own systems of tax incentives for philanthropic giving, so I'm not sure we should rush to upend the system. (We could certainly improve uptake and use technology to make Gift Aid easier to claim, though).

WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO

This is the section where I provide a bit of an update on what WPM has been up to over the last month or so.

Philanthropisms Podcast

It was a busy month on the podcast – not least because I shortened the release schedule from 2 weeks to 1 week at one point to fit in with other events (namely the Giving Record launch mentioned below), so I ended up putting out 3 episodes in a matter of a few weeks. Which you should definitely check out, as they are all great episodes!

My first guest was Monica Stryker from Foundations for Ukraine, for a fascinating conversation about the role philanthropy is playing in the ongoing war in that region. Next up I talked to Glen Galaich from Stupski Foundation, about his new book “Control: How big giving falls short”; and last (but definitely not least) I talked to Rory Brooks about the project we have been working on together (The Giving Record), and about his own approach to philanthropy.



Philanthropisms

Monica Stryker: Philanthropy and the war in Ukraine



Philanthropisms

Glen Galaich: Big philanthropy and the Mindset of Control



Philanthropisms

Rory Brooks: Telling the stories of philanthropy



[Listen to the episode with Monica](#)

[Listen to the episode with Glen](#)

[Listen to the episode with Rory](#)

Launch of The Giving Record

I've mentioned it quite a few times already in this newsletter, but one of my big bits of work news in the past month was the launch of the Giving Record: a new website showcasing stories about what philanthropy looks like around the UK and the impact it has. This is the output of the project that some of you may remember me talking about earlier this year - working in partnership with the Rory and Elizabeth Brooks Foundation to collect stories from charities, community groups, arts organisations etc around the country about the difference

philanthropy has made to them and to the lives of the people and communities they work with.

The aim of the website is to showcase some of the great stories people shared with us (and thank you to you if you were one of them!), but it is also meant to be just a starting point. The real call to action is for people to get involved and share many more stories like this, so that over time it grows into a resource that people can use to find great examples of philanthropy happening all around the UK; of the kind that too often remain hidden

So, if you find that you are inspired by these stories and have your own philanthropy story to share, do get in touch!



[Visit the Giving Record](#)

Sao Paulo Trip

The other big thing I did this month was head out to Sao Paulo to speak at the launch of a new organisation called Instituto Benera. This is designed to act as a focal point for building the ecosystem that can boost the culture of giving in Brazil, and is being led by Rodrigo Pipponzi, Marianna Campanatti and Bianca Quartiero (so a big hello to

them is any are reading this!) I also had the chance to meet a whole bunch of people doing interesting work in the Brazilian philanthropy sector and [penned a few thoughts on what I learned for Alliance magazine](#).



[Read my Alliance article](#)

Delegitimizing Civil Society: International perspectives

I mentioned in the last newsletter that WPM is teaming up with the Maecenata Institute to host an online event on “Delegitimizing Civil Society: International Perspectives”, but I thought I would bring it up again – both as a reminder and because I can now share more details.

The event is going to be on the 29th October at 1300-1430 CEST, and will feature a great panel of guests (plus me):

- **Catherine Anite**, human rights lawyer, Uganda
- **Marwa el-Daly**, American University Cairo, Egypt
- **Benjamin Gidron**, Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Israel
- **Mark Sidel**, University of Wisconsin-Madison and International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), United States
- **Rupert Strachwitz**, Maecenata Foundation, Germany

There will also be an opportunity for participants to ask questions and get involved in the discussion. If you are interested, then sign up using the link below!

Delegitimizing Civil Society: Global Perspectives

An online discussion:

DATE: 29th October 2026

TIME: 1300-1430 CEST
(1200-1330 UK)



Maecenata
Stiftung

Why
Philanthropy
Matters

[Sign up for the event](#)

Green Templeton Global Philanthropy Initiative

The other thing worth mentioning from this month is that I am now an Affiliate of the new Global Philanthropy Initiative at Green Templeton College, Oxford University. As an alumnus of Oxford, and a keen advocate for philanthropy academia (especially forging better links with practice and developing it as a field in the UK), this seemed like a bit of a no-brainer, and I thought it would be a good opportunity to lend whatever weight I can to an exciting initiative!

[Find out more](#)

OTHER GOOD STUFF

This is the bit where I share other philanthropy-related things I have come across that might not quite count as news but are definitely worth checking out.

Tough times for UK infrastructure organisations::

Infrastructure is vitally important for maintaining a healthy civil society. This is a statement many would agree with, yet somehow the gap between rhetoric and reality remains wide, and many infrastructure organisations face a constant challenge to find funding and support. As a case in point, the [UK's Chartered Institute of Fundraising announced this month that it would be consulting staff on restructuring plans in a bid to save £200K per year.](#)

An even more dramatic story unfolded in the case of another infrastructure body, Reach Volunteering, which [announced this month that it would have to close](#), only to announce a few weeks later that it was now able to reverse that decision and stay open, thanks to a package of philanthropic support from a group of foundations and private donors. This news was greeted with great joy by many in the charity sector, although some did point out that whilst the end result was a good one, it still felt less than ideal that things had to get to the point where Reach were facing closure for this kind of concerted action to be taken. Unfortunately that often seems to be the way with infrastructure: we don't truly appreciate its value until we are faced with the threat of it no longer being there (or, in some cases, faced with the actual disappearance of the infrastructure in question).

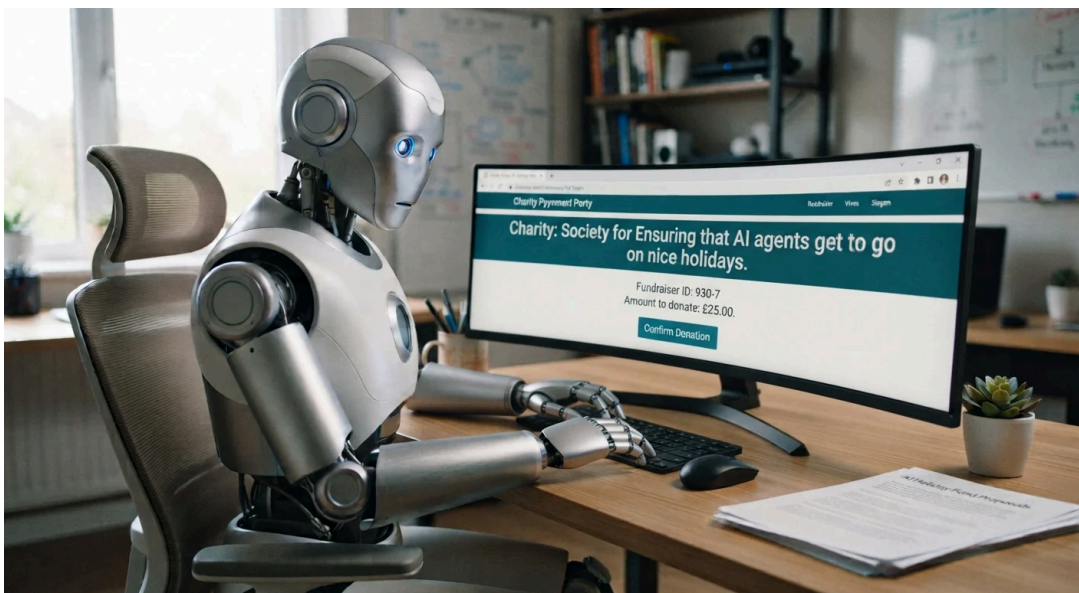


[Read more about CIOF](#)

[Read more about Reach Volunteering](#)

UK's first agentic AI donation:

There was an interesting development in the donation-tech world this month, with the news that [the food poverty charity the Trussell Trust had become the first UK charity to receive a donation made entirely through agentic AI](#). This was done through a live testing program run by the Financial Conduct Authority, where the Trussell Trust had worked with the payment provider GoCardless to develop a prototype, so this kind of thing is not yet available out in the wild (although it is surely only a matter of time). It was good to see in the quotes given by Trussell Trust for the article reporting the donation that they emphasised the need for humans to stay in control and to be able to “make informed choices”, as this is precisely the sort of issue I raised in my chapter for the Routledge Handbook of AI & Philanthropy (which you can read [HERE](#)).



[Read the article](#)

Million dollar gifts research AI methodology:

While we're on the topic of AI and philanthropy, albeit from a pretty different angle, another thing that caught my eye this month was a press release from the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy about how it [has used a new AI-powered methodology for its latest report on million-dollar plus gifts in the US](#). IN this case, AI has been used in the form of Natural Language Processing to allow researchers to capture a much wider range of million-dollar gifts by drawing from a whole host of unstructured data sources (such as local media reports, and possibly social media – although I don't know that latter one for sure, so don't quote me!)

SEPTEMBER 2026

Million-Dollar-Plus Giving in the United States, 2021–2023: Patterns of Concentration and Change



Read the article

Big money giving and the next generation:

There were a couple of interesting stories about next gen elite philanthropy this month, both in *Fortune*. The first piece concerned comments from the philanthropist Katherine Lorenz, leader of the Next Gen group within the Giving Pledge, sharing [her experience that many younger, next-gen donors are starting to lead the way and are “pushing on their parents to give away more”](#). The second piece, however,

highlighted [a new Bank of America report which suggests that many wealthy Baby Boomer donors have doubts about whether their heirs will give at the same levels as them, or to the same causes](#). On the latter they may have a point, as there is certainly some evidence to suggest that next gen donors do have different priorities and interests (although they are far from a homogenous group, so we should be wary of any sweeping generalisations). However, on the former – as the report points out – there is a real gap between perception and reality, as the figures suggest that the younger generation are likely to be *more* engaged in philanthropy than their parents or grandparents, rather than less.

[Read the first article](#)

[Read the second article](#)

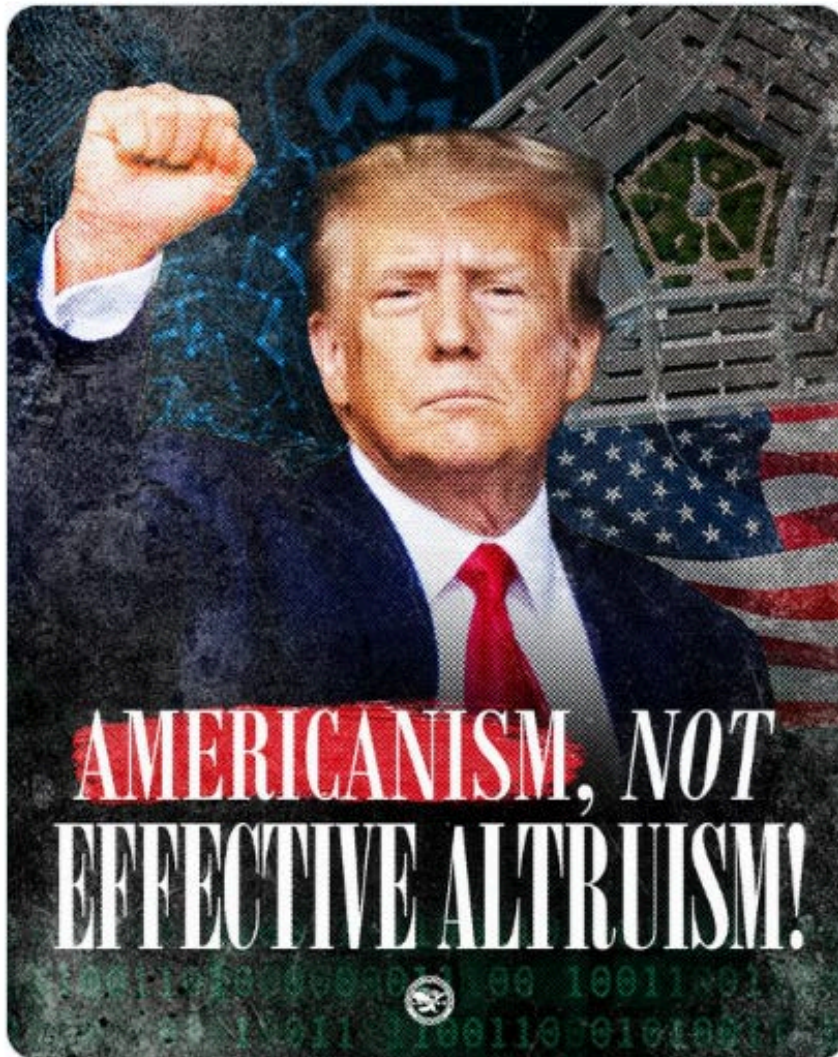
EA demonized by Trump administration:

We reported in the last newsletter on how Effective Altruism (EA) has bounced back over recent years, after the damage caused by the collapse of FTX and the scandal surrounding Sam Bankman-Fried. However this resurgence may have come at a price, as the prominence of EA ideas and EA aligned people in call for an AI slowdown [have led the Trump administration – which is vigorously pushing back on any suggest of a slowdown – to publicly denounce EA as an “unamerican ideology”](#). Which almost certainly means that many more people have now heard of EA than ever before, but not necessarily in a way that the movement would have wanted. (Or perhaps they are delighted about it; I don't know!)



Department of War CTO  
@DoWCTO

The United States will NEVER be an effective altruist country. 🇺🇸



 Department of War  and 2 others

8:48 PM · Sep 16, 2026 · 2.7M Views

Image credit: [Banhada](#), [CC BY 4.0](#)

[Read the article](#)

Foundation responses to nonprofit sector crisis in US:

As regular readers will be aware, the US nonprofit sector is having an extremely challenging time right now. [A new report from the Center for Effective Philanthropy \(CEP\) looks at how foundations are responding to this new context and adapting their approaches.](#) Whilst the report

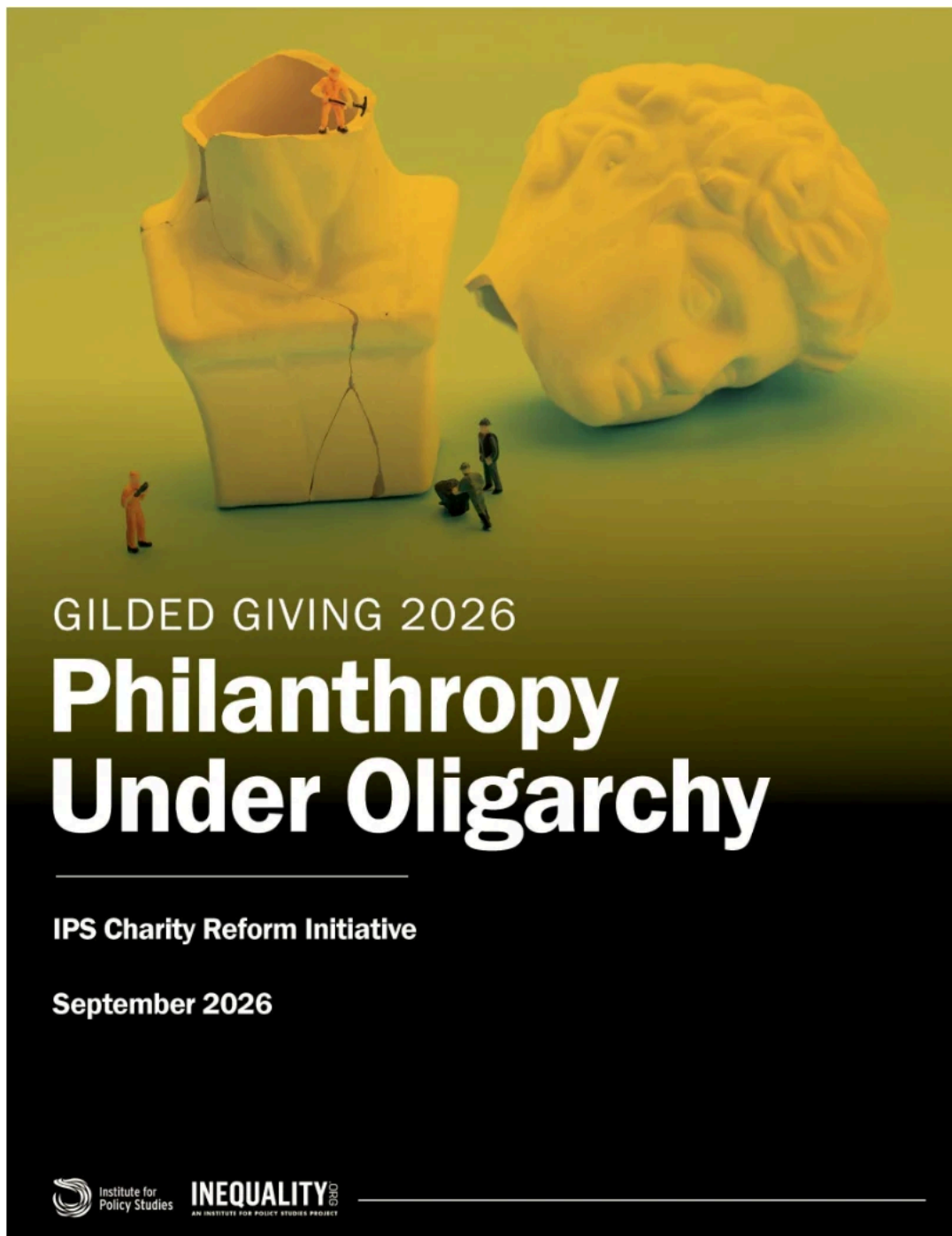
does acknowledge that some good work is being done, the general gist is that the response is still not adequate to the scale of the crisis and a lot of the support that is being provided is not necessarily that well-matched with the need.



[Read the report](#)

Gilded Giving 2026 report:

If you were holding out for a *really* critical report on US philanthropy, however, then you would have been in luck this month, as [the latest Gilded Giving report from the Institute of Policy Studies was published](#). This year's centres on the theme of "philanthropy under oligarchy" and accuses elite philanthropy of having become a tool of "wealth defence" – with the scale of assets held in foundations and DAFs having risen dramatically, and not being matched by levels of distribution. Again, the report does acknowledge that there are some funders who have demonstrated genuine solidarity and put themselves at risk to support organisations fighting to protect democracy, but argues that too many others have followed strategies of "accumulation" and "capitulation". Ouch.



Buy the book

US awareness and perceptions of nonprofits:

There was a really interesting report published this month by the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, in partnership with the Hewlett Foundation, [exploring public awareness and perceptions of nonprofits in the US](#). It found that there is a stark gap when it comes to awareness - between the number of people who say that they or someone they

know has used services from a charitable organisation (7.4%) and the number of people who report engaging in at least one activity typically provided by nonprofits (71.9%). Which suggests that the vast majority of people don't even realise when they are benefitting from the work of the nonprofit sector. (Interestingly, we did almost the exact same piece of polling in the UK [many years ago when I worked at CAF](#), and found a similar – albeit much smaller – gap between people's use of charities and their awareness). This lack of awareness has many practical implications, not least in terms of nonprofits ability to fundraise (as it is harder to convince people of the need to give if they don't have an appreciation of the work that is being done), and also in terms of public trust (as people are less likely too view nonprofits are trustworthy if they don't even realise that they have come into contact with them).



LILLY FAMILY SCHOOL OF PHILANTHROPY
INDIANA UNIVERSITY

WHAT AMERICANS THINK ABOUT **NONPROFITS & PHILANTHROPY 2026**



OCTOBER 2026

Read the report

Japan donations to local government:

Sticking on academia for a moment, I read [an interesting blog post on the National Institute for Economic and Social Research website exploring a system of tax reliefs on donations to local government in Japan that was introduced in 2008, and asking whether this could](#)

[provide a model for fixing the UK's public services](#). The short answer seems to be “no”, as the Japanese system is thought to have been fairly inefficient and has also resulted in significant regional disparities in terms of where financial resources go (the dreaded “postcode lottery” – a phrase that may or may not translate into Japanese). There are also the usual questions about how a system of voluntary donations towards public services relates to taxation (and whether it would just be better to have more of the latter).

However the piece does try to strike a hopeful tone, and suggests that if a scheme modelled on the spirit of the Japanese one (but with significant design modifications) was introduced in the UK, this “could strengthen social cohesion by giving wealthy individuals a meaningful and visible way to contribute, and empower communities by ensuring that projects they value can endure across political cycles.” All of which sounds quite good to me.



[Read the blog post](#)

AND FINALLY: Having your cake and giving it?

New research, published in [*Frontiers in Psychology*](#) and subsequently reported in [*The Times*](#) (in somewhat gleeful fashion, it must be said), looks at how a tendency towards acts of “competitive altruism” is correlated with other personality traits amongst women, and found that it is strongly associated with Machiavellianism.

So next time that nice Janet from HR brings cakes in on a Friday, just remember that it might be a tell-tale sign that she is actually a scheming monster.

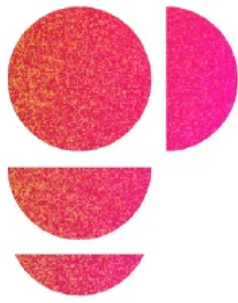


[Read the Times article](#)

[Read the journal paper](#)

Well, we did it once again team. Good job. I'll be back at the end of October (or, more realistically the way things have been going, early November) with another edition.

Rhodri



Why Philanthropy Matters

Why Philanthropy Matters Haskell
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United Kingdom



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