

Celebrity Philanthropy

Celebrities have many ways of using their generosity to benefit the issues that matter to them. In our culture, fame is bankable not only at the box office and in product sponsorship, but in fundraising on social, health, and environmental issues. In addition to making large cash donations, celebrities speak out about the things they care about. They attend fundraising gatherings, which helps draw in more donors. They sponsor events to raise money. They influence other celebrities to do likewise. Perhaps the biggest breakthrough in celebrity philanthropy is that they are learning—as we all must—about how to be more strategic and have more impact in the way they use their fame and fortune.

Here are a number of examples of celebrity philanthropy that can teach us about finding or designing projects with positive impact. These philanthropists have reached out in many ways; these are just some of them.

ATHLETES

Athletes' charities and foundations funnel more than \$57 million a year to charitable causes with programs such as these:

- New York Yankees player Derek Jeter started his Turn 2 Foundation to motivate young people to stay away from drugs and turn to a healthier lifestyle.

- The U.S. speedskater Joey Cheek received \$40,000 for winning two medals at the 2006 Olympics and donated all of his winnings to Right to Play, a Toronto-based humanitarian organization, to help Sudanese refugee children in Chad. His challenge to Olympic sponsors to match his pledge has resulted in more than \$300,000 in donations.
- The first fundraiser for Chris Evert Charities in 1989 was proclaimed the most successful first-year benefit in tennis history when it raised \$350,000. The 2005 16th Anniversary of the Chris Evert Pro-Celebrity Tennis Classic raised a record-breaking \$1.2 million dollars. The donated funds go to a variety of programs related to youth and health.
- Basketball star Stephon Marbury of the New York Knicks counters the pressure kids and parents feel to pay top dollar for the latest and coolest sneakers by financing the creation and marketing of “Starbury One,” a basketball sneaker that sells for \$14.98—compared to the usual \$75 to \$200 for other sports shoes marketed to kids.

ENTERTAINERS

- Oprah Winfrey gave \$40 million to start a girls school in South Africa.
- George Clooney, devastated by learning that Darfur and Chad were on the verge of genocidal catastrophe, sought advice from his father, a retired newsman. They decided together to go to Chad, with George the celebrity and his dad the reporter. In the face of U.S. State Department advice urging U.S. citizens to stay away, George’s dad said, “I think it’s now or never.” George thought, “I’m forty-five and don’t have kids. My dad is seventy-two. If anybody should go, it should be us.” When he returned from Darfur, George and Holocaust survivor and Nobel Prize winner Elie Wiesel jointly addressed the United Nations Security Council and members of the U.S. Congress, urging them to take specific actions.
- Tom Hanks serves as the American ambassador and a major fundraiser for the Freeplay Foundation, which provides wind-up radios to the world’s poorest populations, especially children living on their own in Africa and Asia. The radios enable isolated children, refugees, and disabled people to have sustained access to information and education.

- And, of course, the long and wonderful history of televised fundraisers was begun by pioneers such as the Jerry Lewis Telethon for Muscular Dystrophy and carried on by LiveAid, Comic Relief, BandAid, and Make Poverty History's Live 8 concerts, among others.
- Rosie O'Donnell established her For All Kids Foundation, Inc. in 1997 to provide financial support to nonprofit programs serving economically disadvantaged and at-risk children and their families.
- Hip-hop and entertainment leader Russell Simmons, cofounder of Def Jam Records and Phat Farm Clothing, established the Rush Philanthropic Arts Foundation and Hip-Hop Summit Action Network, nonprofits for youth to get involved in the arts and social causes.
- Founded by musician Peter Gabriel, WITNESS is an international human rights organization that provides training and support to local groups to use video in their human rights advocacy campaigns. Beyond providing video cameras and editing equipment, WITNESS helps broker relationships with international media outlets, government officials, policymakers, activists, and the general public so that once a video is made, it can be used as a tool to advocate for change.
- As well as raising an estimated \$50 million to benefit AIDS groups, Elizabeth Taylor broke the silence and the taboo about the disease among celebrities when she first spoke out about it in 1985. Two years later, Princess Diana took an important step by being photographed touching and hugging children with AIDS in order to dispel the notion that one could catch the disease through skin contact.