

Philanthropy: In 2026, Let's Move Beyond Kindness, Gratitude and Resilience

Philanthropie: en 2026, allons au-delà de la bienveillance, la gratitude et la résilience

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At the start of every year, the philanthropic sector engages in an exercise that has become almost ritual: trying to predict what the year ahead holds in store. New models, new expectations, new pressures. And, often, new demands.

For 2026, I propose a different exercise. Not what philanthropy will need, but what it no longer wants.

Three words stand out. They're repeated ad nauseam, and by now, downright overused: kindness, gratitude and resilience.

They weren't chosen at random. For a long time, they carried real meaning. Today, from being invoked without nuance over and over, they've been emptied of their substance and, worse still, they sometimes serve to mask a far more uncomfortable reality.

Resilience: Enough Is Enough

Resilience has become the philanthropic sector's implicit requirement. As if we were the miracle department. Every crisis—whether it's a health, social, climate or economic one—comes with the same expectation: that philanthropic and community organizations will adapt. That organizations will hold on. That teams will absorb the blow.

We're not asking the sector to get better. We're asking it to absorb the blow. But resilience isn't an infinite resource. It's a human, organizational and contextual capacity. When it becomes an obligation, it stops being a quality and becomes a burden.

In 2026, philanthropy no longer wants to be applauded for its resilience while its underfunding, its overload and its structural precarity are being normalized.

It no longer wants to "hold down the fort" while the foundations themselves crumble.

Gratitude: How Far Does It Go?

Let's be clear: recognition of donors and volunteers isn't in question. It's essential. It's part of the philanthropic sector's DNA.

But the place gratitude has taken in the public discourse around philanthropy deserves to be challenged. By constantly praising and celebrating the sector for what it manages to keep alive, we end up normalizing a situation that, in reality, should worry us.

Because if philanthropy receives so much gratitude, it's not only because it does its job well. It's also because it has become, for our society, a substitute pillar—a space to which we increasingly delegate responsibility for meeting basic needs. Needs that public and collective systems are struggling to secure. Think of housing, food, mental health, education and research, to name just a few.

Philanthropy isn't ungrateful, but it refuses to let gratitude serve as a screen.

In 2026, it no longer wants thank-yous to replace the deeper questions about our collective dependence on a sector that shouldn't, on its own, have to carry so much responsibility.

Kindness, Yes—But Not One-Way

Philanthropy is often presented as "the" sector of kindness. That's true, and it's exactly the problem. From constantly being reduced to that role, organizations come to be seen as spaces where kindness should be enough to make up for burnout, pressure and instability.

As if kindness could replace viable working conditions. As if empathy could erase limits. And yet, for many organizations, 2026 is shaping up to be less a year of kindness than a year of survival.

Philanthropy doesn't want to abandon this word. It wants it to stop being one-sided. It wants society, funders, and political and economic decision-makers to be kind toward the sector itself—toward its organizations, its teams, its volunteers, its executive directors, its boards of directors.

Changing the Vocabulary Means Changing the Stance

These three words (kindness, gratitude and resilience) aren't bad in themselves. But when they become slogans, they stop shedding light on reality and start dangerously oversimplifying it.

In 2026, philanthropy isn't asking for more symbolic recognition. It's asking that we stop staging its capacity to take the hits. It no longer wants to be seen only as a flexible, adaptable, silent social safety net.

It wants to be recognized as a structuring actor, with limits, needs and a right to sustainability. Perhaps that's the real shift we need to make: fewer reassuring words, more shared responsibility.

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