



Indian American Philanthropy: Strengthening Values and Community Across Generations

By Rohit Menezes, Isaiah Baker, and Bradley Seeman

Recognizing the relevance and potential of Indian American philanthropy, our Bridgespan team, in partnership with the Ford Foundation, sought to learn more about the Indian American diaspora's giving and explore how to increase its momentum. In addition to examining available data, we interviewed more than 60 donors, nonprofit leaders, and other experts, listening to the voices, experiences, and ideas of a wide range of people who are intimately familiar with the community.

Conversations with Indian Americans about their community's place in the United States often follow a familiar arc—a recitation of extraordinary achievement.

Prosperity frequently comes up: in 2023, Indian Americans reported a median annual household income of \$151,200, nearly double the US median of \$80,610.¹ So, too, does professional prominence: community members lead many of the largest US-based tech companies,² account for as many as 10 percent of America's doctors,³ and own more than 50 percent of its small- and mid-sized hotels and motels.⁴

For a relatively new immigrant community—now 5.2 million members, up from only 360,000 in 1980⁵—these achievements are worthy of pride. But underneath the triumphal narrative lies a more complex story about how Indian Americans are grappling with identity and belonging in the United States.ⁱ

Immigrants to the United States from across the globe strive to carry their culture forward and sustain core ideals while adapting to new environments and building new relationships. Like other communities with familial ties to other nations, Indian Americans routinely negotiate how they and their families fit into American life while honoring their traditions and staying connected to their roots in India. Recently, this negotiation has been complicated by charged public discourse about immigrants⁶ in the United States.

Giving can be a powerful vehicle for this negotiation, and Indian American giving is on the rise. The available data are clear: Indian Americans are civically engaged and generous. There is a vast cadre of volunteers, donors, and advocates who embrace generosity and showcase what matters to them along the way.

"Are Indian Americans generous?" says Meena Lakdawalla-Flynn, chair of Global Private Wealth Management at Goldman Sachs. "I would say that Indian Americans are among the most generous communities I have worked with."

Indian Americans volunteer at three times the national average in the United States and have substantially increased their philanthropic giving over the past several years. A joint report on Indian American diaspora philanthropy⁷ by Indiaspora, Dalberg, and the India Philanthropy Alliance found that diaspora giving has increased dramatically over the past decade to \$4–5 billion in 2024. The increase is partly due to a rise in Indian Americans' median income, but mainly because a much higher share of donor household income is being given away—rising from an estimated 1–2 percent in 2018 to 4–5 percent in 2024.

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i By "Indian American," we are referring to the Indian diaspora residing in the United States, regardless of citizenship.

* Source: Dalberg, Indiaspora, and the India Philanthropy Alliance, *From Closing the Gap to Setting the Standard: The State of Philanthropic Giving in the Indian American Diaspora*, 2026.



In our interviews, we found Indian American donors giving in a wide variety of ways. Consider the example of Sapna Saxena, co-founder of Neel Capital Management, who also runs the Saxena Family Foundation. Like many diaspora donors, Saxena gives in both the United States and India, and has found creative ways to link the two. At The Coolidge Corner Theatre, a nonprofit cinema she supports in the Boston area, she underwrote a series featuring Indian films titled “Cinema Masala.” “It’s giving people an opportunity to connect with a part of Indian culture. Locally, 1,500 tickets were sold, with multiple screenings selling out entirely. It doesn’t always need to be big numbers or make a big splash. You can start small.”

The Saxena family also expresses gratitude toward India—where Saxena’s parents benefited from education at the Indian Institute of Technology and Delhi University—with substantial gifts to organizations such as Akshaya Patra and Ashoka University. “My parents made clear that they can only do what they do now in large part thanks to their education. As long as my parents and I are around, money will always be focused on education in India because of respect for my parents and for where we come from,” says Saxena.

A belief in education is an important theme in Indian American giving, not only to institutions in India but also to those in the United States. Indiaspora, a network of global leaders of Indian origin, estimates that Indian Americans have given over \$3 billion to higher education in the United States since 2008.⁸

When the Indian American community talks about its giving, the potential for even greater impact is unmistakable. Growing in numbers and wealth, the community is on the verge of a significant intergenerational wealth transfer. Indian Americans are orienting their philanthropy toward both where they live and where their families came from.

“The United States is where my bread is buttered. It’s the country of my children and grandchildren. We are committed to contributing our skills and resources here,” says Shekar Narasimhan, who built a career in finance after moving to the United States in the 1970s. Narasimhan is involved in a variety of US causes—among other things, he is chair and co-founder of the [AAPI Victory Fund](#), which promotes Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander candidates for elected office.

At the same time, the potential of the Indian American diaspora to have a major impact in India has never been greater. A report from Give Grants identified an opportunity for the Indian

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American diaspora to give in ways that create significant impact for India's most vulnerable citizens around such goals as climate action, gender equity, food security, and economic growth.⁹ Indeed, several studies and reports over the past several years attest to the potential impact of diaspora giving in India.¹⁰

Many of the donors in our most recent interviews see India as having a mature, vibrant social sector—allowing their funding to make a real difference. And private funding can do things that government or corporate social responsibility (CSR) funding rarely can—for example, helping NGOs serve as R&D hubs that pave the way for larger-scale government funding.¹¹ As India seeks to transform itself into a fully developed, self-reliant country by its anniversary celebrating 100 years of independence in 2047, giving from the Indian American diaspora could make a powerful and distinctive difference in contributing to India's nation-building goals by giving to institutions, causes, or communities that are under-supported by domestic philanthropy and CSR funding.

We believe Indian American philanthropy, both in the United States and to India, will continue to be shaped and reinforced by three powerful currents described by many of those we interviewed—expressing values and interests, building community, and strengthening connections across generations. We explore those three themes below. We conclude by exploring opportunities to overcome the challenges that are holding back giving.

1 Expressing Values and Interests

Values are at the core of all kinds of giving. For Indian Americans, one example is remittances—funds that flow from US residents to their relatives, friends, and associates in India. Remittances are an expression of familial and community connection and the United States is the largest single source of remittances to India,¹² accounting for approximately \$33 billion in the 2023-24 fiscal year, according to the Reserve Bank of India. Members of the Indian American diaspora also demonstrate their commitment to faith traditions with their giving—as evidenced by thousands of temples, mosques, gurudwaras, and other institutions across the United States.

In our interviews, we saw how larger-scale Indian American philanthropy is also shaped by the values and interests that inform donors' worldviews. One of the most consistent themes we heard was the importance of parents and other family members in shaping diaspora givers' approach to their philanthropy.

Rashi Mehta, for example, cofounded and played a central role in growing a technology company into a global operation before selling it. Now she is channeling a combination of management skills, time, and financial resources toward philanthropy both in the United States and India. Her foundation is called the Iron Lady Foundation—named in honor of her mother, who was one of the first female gynecologists in the state of Rajasthan and used her position to provide free services to women and girls in rural districts.

Remittances are an expression of familial and community connection, and the United States is the largest single source of remittances to India, accounting for approximately

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Source: Dharendra Gajbhiye et al., "Changing Dynamics of India's Remittances — Insights from the Sixth Round of India's Remittances Survey," RBI Bulletin, March 2025.

"I never saw my mother back down," says Mehta. She remembers visiting those villages as a youth and observing how women and girls had "sparks in their eyes" even as the surrounding society sometimes treated them as a burden.

Today, Mehta's philanthropy focuses on girls' education and women's empowerment. Every few months, the foundation's work takes Mehta back to rural India, where she spends time with nonprofit staff and community members. The work is informed by what she learned from her mother and from her own life experience. "When women and girls are given access to opportunity, they create lasting change within their families and communities."

We also spoke with donors whose values and interests have been shaped not only by their roots in India but also by their experiences building companies in the United States. They proudly embrace their identities as entrepreneurs, even when they turn to philanthropy. They are eager to get their hands dirty, bringing the grit and resolve required to build a successful venture.



A new beginning with first letters: Adivasi women in Kotra, Rajasthan, begin an adult literacy program with Iron Lady Foundation. Photo credit: Yash Photograph/KCL Photography

Consider Deepak Chopra (no relation to the famous author), who lives part-time in California and is the founder and CEO of Freedom Employability Academy (FEA), which offers a program in north India's Hindi belt for youth to build employability skills, including English, digital and AI literacy, and personal skills like self-confidence and communication. "I'm an entrepreneur," explains Chopra. "We may not be the brightest people in the room, but we're hardwired for persistence."



A group of women in an FEA classroom learn employability skills in the village of Ahemad Bass in Haryana, India. Photo credit: Deepak Chopra/FEA

Chopra launched his philanthropic efforts concurrently with for-profit ventures; he has founded or cofounded multiple companies. Beginning in 1999, Chopra started spending half his time on his philanthropic work. He credits his overall success to the balance between his for-profit and philanthropic focus: "Working on FEA helped me be a more patient, kind person. My business experience made me more efficient and helped me understand the importance of talent development."

Like any committed entrepreneur, Chopra is focused on results. An impact evaluation by Stanford researchers found that by completing a one-year FEA program, a student, on average, will add enough to their career earnings



to move from low income to middle income. Graduates earn over \$55,000 more over the course of their careers than their peers who do not participate. Chopra invests about \$18 million per year in FEA's program. This support helps FEA provide a 500-plus-hour program to approximately 100,000 students per year at physical training centers. FEA has already served over 800,000 students.

Professional identities, as entrepreneurs or otherwise, inform the philanthropy of many other givers whom we spoke to. Vidya Prakash was a management consultant at McKinsey & Company's Global Public Health Practice, where she grew to appreciate the power of business approaches to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of nonprofit organizations. Now a volunteer and a donor supporting gender equality in the United States, India, and elsewhere, Prakash seeks to bring her professional expertise to bear in her philanthropy. "There's so much you can do to help organizations improve their effectiveness, like board governance or monitoring and evaluation."

Among other activities, Prakash facilitates a session every two months with the CEOs of several Indian nonprofits. "Often there's no set agenda. We vent, we problem-solve, we explore patterns and learnings across organizations. It's a safe space for frank conversations." Some of these organizations Prakash supports with funding, others with expertise alone.

Other givers choose to anchor less in their families and professional identities and more in how they believe lasting positive change can be achieved. California resident BU Patel and his family have built significant wealth through the hospitality industry and a diversified investment portfolio. Patel's formal philanthropic journey took shape in response to a devastating earthquake in the family's home state of Gujarat in 2001. Watching the aftermath, Patel noted that the most effective responses were coming from within the communities experiencing the challenges, not from outsiders, and that relying on deep local knowledge could yield greater results.

That "aha" moment about trusting local communities to lead their own change has increasingly animated the family's giving via the Tarsadia Foundation. For example, the foundation has directed a \$10 million five-year grant to the [Rebuild India Fund](#). This collaborative vehicle is supported by Dasra, a leading Indian philanthropic intermediary and systems orchestrator that works to coordinate actors in the social sector. Rebuild India provides flexible, multiyear funding to grassroots organizations serving some of the most marginalized and overlooked communities across India. A core principle of the fund is the trust it places in grantees to use the funding as the organizations themselves see fit, which dovetails with the Tarsadia Foundation's belief in the importance of local knowledge and community power.

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VIDYA PRAKASH, FORMER MANAGEMENT CONSULTANT, CURRENT VOLUNTEER AND DONOR FOR GENDER EQUALITY

2 Building Community

Giving is often inspired and supported through collaboration, peer networks, and community activities and organizations. In our interviews, we repeatedly heard about the connections Indian American donors have built with others around their ideals, identity, and philanthropy, and how these connections power their giving. It's a two-way street: engaging in community enables giving, and the act of giving enables community. For an immigrant group such as Indians in the United States, this can be a powerful force to build shared identity and common purpose.

Sometimes, this community building is local. Earlier, we described how Sapna Saxena helped bring together members of the Indian American community in the Boston area around Indian cinema. She also coordinates a group to participate in a 5K run to benefit Special Olympics Massachusetts, a sports organization for children and adults with intellectual disabilities. "We have 65–70 people join us, and it's mostly Indians or Indian Americans on the team. It gets people together, and we talk about giving."



Celebrating Pratham's 30th anniversary, the Pratham USA Chicago Gala 2025 welcomed members of the Indian diaspora community to celebrate its shared mission and honor decades of the organization's work. Photo credit: Pratham USA/UV ZenPho Productions

In other cases, larger Indian nonprofits with a presence in the United States use a chapter model with local galas that help them raise funds, while also strengthening Indian American donors' connections with one another and to India. Pratham USA, for example, which develops and delivers educational programs in India and elsewhere, has chapters in 14 communities across the United States, led by over 300 volunteer leaders. "Pratham is lucky to have a network of volunteers across the country. They host events in their homes or organize community-building events like walks and galas," explains CEO and Global Executive Manisha Bharti. "They are not only about fundraising. They are also about creating community and connection and spreading joy."

Indiaspora, a global organization, is working in dozens of countries to build bridges among diaspora leaders so that they can be a force for greater impact. In the United States, Indiaspora annually hosts gatherings that feature diaspora attendees from diverse backgrounds—spanning the arts to sports to academia to business.

"Volunteering is hugely satisfying," says Akbar Poonawala, who emigrated to the United States in the 1980s for an MBA before building a career in finance. Poonawala started volunteering with the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), a global development organization working to address the root causes of poverty in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, as a way to get involved in social impact while also building community. He has now served as a volunteer leader for AKF at the regional and national levels across three decades. "Of course, you feel you are doing something worthwhile with an amazing organization by helping create opportunities for others through the foundation's work. You also get to meet and make friends with people you respect and admire. I have benefited from multi-decade relationships."

A few of these organizations have shown that it is possible to bring donors together at a very large scale. Pratham USA engages over 7,000 donors to raise approximately \$30 million annually. Akshaya Patra, which offers free lunches in Indian public schools and works hard to reach Indian Americans, has nearly 40,000 individual donors within the Indian American diaspora. Through their outreach efforts in the United States, these organizations have also raised funds from donors beyond the Indian American community.



Students engage in project-based learning, building a model of their community using recycled materials, at the Government Middle School in Rayagada, Odisha, as part of Mantra4Change's work with government schools. Photo credit: Ravi M.

There is also a steady stream of other Indian NGOs coming to the United States to engage the diaspora for advice and funding. One relative newcomer is Mantra4Change, supported by the Shibulal family and other donors, which seeks to strengthen government schools in five Indian states through partnerships with state and district education departments. While the organization is not pursuing short-term fundraising at the moment, it is convening diaspora members to share more about its work on Shikshagraha, the pan-India movement on education equity.

"Right now, we are in a delayed gratification phase. We are coming, we are meeting people, and we are telling them what we are doing with no expectation of fundraising," says Santosh More, who cofounded the organization. Early signals are promising. Whereas the organization's first San Francisco gathering three years ago drew fewer than 10 attendees, its events in 2026 are attracting an average of 50–60 people per event. More notes that diaspora engagement offers the potential for more than money, as the organization is seeking academic partnerships and mentors in areas such as technology, research, and narrative building.

Collaboration can be a particularly powerful way to build community among donors. It helps reduce the risk of giving alone while offering the opportunity to learn from and influence others. Collaborative efforts such as the [India Philanthropy Alliance](#) (IPA), a US-based coalition of more than 30 organizations focused on India's development, and [India Giving Day](#), an annual campaign championed by IPA to galvanize giving, also address oft-cited donor concerns about which organizations they can trust by providing suggestions about vetted nonprofits in India.

By launching the Rebuild India Fund with Dasra through the family's Tarsadia Foundation, the Patels chose to support collaborative giving. Says Shirish Dayal, executive vice president of Tarsadia, "By creating a fund, we hoped to engage other people and help change how funding is done—do it in a way that is locally guided and longer term."

3 Engaging Across Generations

Philanthropy is deeply connected to society and politics, but it is also deeply personal. Many of the Indian American diaspora donors we spoke with view their philanthropy not only as a way to have an impact on the world, but also as an avenue for transmitting culture and values across generations. Cross-generational engagement is an especially ripe issue for Indian nonprofits, which observe and are concerned about a declining connection between successive generations of Indian Americans and India.

The Tarsadia Foundation, which today comprises three generations, is intentional about engaging the next generations. “For us, the next generations are very respectful to the wishes of the patriarch,” says Dayal. “But they don’t have ties to India like the first generation. We’ve organized service trips to India where the family might not have gone on their own—so they can see the reality on the ground and make a connection of their own.”

Across the Indian American diaspora philanthropy ecosystem, there are similar stories of multigenerational commitment being upheld by American-born children. Examples include Sapphira Goradia Shaw’s work with the Vijay and Marie Goradia Foundation—an anchor funder of Pratham USA, Project ECHO, and Antara International—and Pia Desai’s work with the Desai Sethi Foundation—a funder of economic mobility, education, and health programs that is active simultaneously in the United States and India.

A common experience among these families is an effort to stay connected to India through regular trips and the active engagement of the next generation in philanthropic practice, wherever it occurs. “I grew up going to India every other year, which was instrumental in forging who I am. I grew up with so much, and on my trips, I got to see in stark ways how differently my parents grew up,” says Sapphira Goradia Shaw. She adds, “I was raised in a culture that was generous. You are supposed to care about your family and community. If you can help, you help. Actually, you don’t think of it as ‘help.’ It’s just what you do.”

Numerous Indian NGOs and Indian American philanthropic institutions understand the importance of connecting across generations of givers and are investing in activities to help families engage the next generation. For example, the American India Foundation offers a youth ambassador program for high school students that provides diaspora youth with immersive

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experiences in India. The India Philanthropy Alliance sponsors an annual essay competition for middle and high school students to share their thoughts on key development issues in India. AKF USA exposes the next generation of community members to the foundation's work through summer camps and internships in South Asia and Africa, and through the Youth Ambassadors program, where high school students research AKF projects and find ways to implement similar programs in their local communities.

Because the “Indian American” identity is often not well defined, the act of giving can be an opportunity for families to reinforce and transmit their culture. “A major influence for me was my mother,” says Mehta of Iron Lady Foundation. “I am trying to pass down philanthropy to my own daughter. She just raised \$1,000 from a bake sale in her school. It’s enough to help open a water pump and provide water for 500 people in India.”

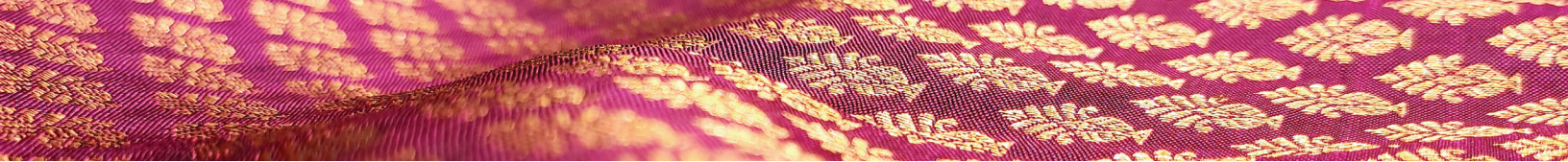
Through our interviews, we heard many stories of parents engaging their children in philanthropy to keep the family connected to their traditions and culture. “For those of us who were born here, brought up here, and grew up here,” Bharti of Pratham USA explains, “it’s challenging to sustain and pass on our language and culture to our kids. As we become parents, philanthropy can become the way we share our values and traditions with our own children.”

Exploring the Opportunities

There are strong natural forces at the heart of Indian American philanthropy, closely tied to the ideas of identity and belonging—expressing values and interests, building community, and connecting across generations.

Given patterns of migration and wealth creation, the evidence suggests that Indian American diaspora philanthropy is still in its early stages. The community is already making strong contributions of effort and money. But an even more vibrant and potentially transformative Indian American philanthropy is possible in the years to come, as the community deepens its roots in the United States and more individuals move in their life journeys from building their wealth to giving back.

For Indian American individuals seeking to explore and deepen their philanthropy, there are many opportunities to examine what is possible. It can help to reflect on questions such as these and to hear how peers have answered them: What experiences of giving have been especially



meaningful and joyful for me and why? What family and community values are showcased by my giving? Given my personal story, how can I “pay it forward” to others? What would it look like for me to leave my mark with my generosity—and what support do I need to achieve that? Who can I give alongside in order to increase my learning and joy?

We also heard a lot about challenges, whether in attracting new donors or in finding effective ways to connect to the next generation. Our interviews revealed that donors often struggle to find high-impact partner organizations and to navigate the limitations of giving as a solo venture. For donors already interested in giving to India, we heard challenges about building trust with organizations, overcoming practical barriers, such as the complexity of India’s foreign philanthropy regulations and other regulatory concerns, and knowing where funding in India might have the most impact.

Sharmila Rao Thakkar, a philanthropy advisor who works with Indian American donors and families, says, “When it comes to giving to India, many donors want to give but may not be sure how or where to begin. They are looking for trusted guidance on credible organizations, cross-border giving, and making informed philanthropic decisions. With the right support, they can give in ways that are meaningful to them and make a difference.”

“People are often nervous about giving to India,” adds Neera Nundy, co-founder of Dasra. “They may have questions about an organization’s credibility, governance, and how funds will be used, which can create hesitation. There is a lot of work to do in terms of building trust and stronger relationships.”

The story of Indian Americans is being written in real time. And our interviews revealed several areas that struck us as fertile ground for exploration as a community.

There is an opportunity to sharpen the narrative about the breadth and depth of the Indian American diaspora experience, including its generosity. Better understanding how the community expresses its values and interests will help shape the Indian American identity itself. To do this, community members ought to freely share their stories and listen to those of their peers. Nor should this dialogue be confined to philanthropic settings. It can happen in

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families, communities, religious spaces, professional groups, and civic settings—exploring the powerful connection between the act of giving and the meaning of being Indian American. More systematic collection of—and reflection on—data on Indian American giving might also better inform both the givers and organizations receiving money.

A rigorous, coordinated set of investments would help advance the success of the philanthropic ecosystem—not merely individual organizations—as its goal. This includes more formal ways to stimulate Indian American philanthropy and encourage giving to India, such as:

- Articulating why giving matters and the diaspora’s distinctive role in giving to India
- Connecting donors across interest areas and geographies, both in the United States and India
- Helping donors and their advisors understand how to surmount regulatory and other barriers to giving in India
- Helping donors in the United States develop understanding and trust with Indian nonprofits
- Creating vetted lists and channels for diaspora funding of specific organizations and issues
- Strengthening the fundraising capabilities of Indian nonprofits to tell their stories and connect more effectively with Indian American donors

Women-focused philanthropy offers a targeted opportunity to reach segments of the diaspora. Indian American women are growing in wealth, yet the joint report on Indian American diaspora giving found that Indian American women give 40 percent less of their income than men do, and 18 percent report that they have not been asked to give to causes they care about. Based on the zeal and creativity we found among the women donors we interviewed for this article, and the paucity of significantly scaled efforts to engage them, we believe that women-focused giving circles or other collaborative opportunities have great potential to increase giving among Indian American women.



Given what we have learned, we are, on balance, optimistic about Indian American diaspora philanthropy. And we are also encouraged by the potential this giving can have. The United States offers many opportunities to give and, likewise, India’s vibrant social sector offers a wide range of ways to make a big impact on the lives of people and communities.

America’s vibrant and ambitious Indian diaspora community has shown it can and will make meaningful investments. Going forward, there are many promising opportunities for the Indian American community to sustain and grow its philanthropic momentum—from engaging peers to investing in the ecosystem to developing women-focused spaces.

Wherever the giving is directed—whether in large or small amounts—we believe that Indian American philanthropy will continue to draw its strength and vitality from how it expresses values and interests, builds community, and strengthens connections across generations.

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