



Title of the session: Member's day -country session Singapore

Summary of the content of the session:

This country session incorporated overviews of the History of Philanthropy in Singapore, alongside current trends in venture philanthropy with a special focus on the significance of the 50th anniversary celebrations of the nation of Singapore. The moderator began the country session by reflecting on the passing of First Prime Minister- Mr Lee Kuan Yew, highlighting the gratitude of a nation to their founding father – on the major accomplishments he achieved. Singapore has been proposed to be a “little model” for other countries to follow because of its amazing development and complexity of its infrastructure. However, the country does face some special challenges- including the high rate of stress related disorders and low fertility replacement rates.

Speakers:

Melissa Kwee, CEO of National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre (NVPC)

Keith Chua (AVPN- Board Member)

Singapore has much to thank the clan organizations. In their endeavors to provide stability they strove to incorporate new migrant groups into the fabric of society. Ngee Ann Kongsi- the teochew charitable clan foundation established an early model of philanthropy which served to weave together and provide structure to the ethnic melting pot of multiple races and many dialects which typified the early days of the nation of Singapore. Education provided focus and the establishment of the Ngee Ann Polytechnic in 1965 served to unify efforts to provide a space for skills learning. Notable other early engagements include the Lee Foundation, the Shaw Foundation and the Lien Foundation – all of whom are still in existence and are now in their 3rd or 4th generation. Particular attention has been paid to establishing healthcare - addressing concerns with infant mortality and poor childhood nutrition.

The government of Singapore offers tax incentives for charitable giving through offsetting taxes when gifts are made to Institutions of Public Character (IPC) - these are charities which are governed by the commissioner of charities. The majority of giving is through religious organizations. The focus of giving is predominantly surrounding issues regarding Education with a smaller amount given to projects in the Arts. There is a call for Singapore to be a philanthropy hub for the region. Recently, there is a rising amount of grass roots philanthropy- with many individuals donating to special interest areas- including issues specific to foreign workers, and special needs education. Philanthropic Giving is a core value of the society of Singapore. Mr. Chua concluded his section with the encouragement, “ Now Everyone Can Give. “



Ming Tan (COMO foundation- Director)

The COMO foundation was set up by Mrs. Christina Ong in 2003 as the Philanthropic wing of the luxury retail and hospitality COMO group. They particular support the work of partners outside of Singapore addressing issues in education and sustainable livelihoods for vulnerable women and girls.

The COMO foundation assesses key areas in relation to organizations who would like to partner with them- specifically examining the number of women being taught and reached. The issue of salaries and KPI's could prove to be problematic- when looked at in a cursory manner- COMO foundation prefers to take an individualized approach instead- looking at core services and key persons involved with particular programmes. The Foundation looks to fund key salaries and helps in providing strategy grants which serve to help smaller organizations take time out to make 5 year development plans.

Jonathan Chang (Lien Centre for Social Innovation- Executive Director)

The Lien Centre for Social Innovation released a report on the unmet social needs in Singapore focusing on six vulnerable communities in 2011. The research they conducted serves to encourage systemic change through capacity building of nonprofit groups via collaboration in the community with the support of academics and other professionals and through engaging SMU students directly in relevant projects.

The Lien Centre for Social Innovation is currently creating a magazine publication which will be uniquely ASEAN focused – in contrast to other publications which are US centered. The aim of this publication is to create a source of media rich content- including podcasts, and other relevant applications on a digital platform to enhance the work they are doing.

Questions and Answers:

Questions 1: How do organizations know that they need to request a capacity building grant or a strategy building grant?

Ming Tan:

COMO foundation works via word of mouth through their existing partners. When organizations are struggling and living in a hand to mouth existence- the temptation exists to not spend time planning but instead devote time to grinding through day to day tasks- however it is wise to take time out to invest in developing a strategy and create a five year plan.

Question 2: What tax incentives does the Singaporean Government offer towards Philanthropy?

Keith Chua:

Philanthropy like water will find it's own level. It is important that dollars go where government money is not going- therefore it is the duty of philanthropy to find the gaps in society where there



are demonstrated areas of need. Philanthropists want to be aligned with national direction- there are direct benefits in tax recovery from IPC status charities.

Question 3: Is there a pattern in the younger generation of philanthropists?

Jonathan Chang:

There is a newer approach with the younger generation- they want to get as close as possible to the impact. There is a keen interest in how exactly is money being spent and what are the measurable outcomes. There is also a realization that there are often non-financial ways to support a project which can be extremely helpful.

Melissa Kwee:

Amongst young investors there is a desire to implement technology in an efficient manner. New startups value “doing good” and this is a core part of how they do business.

Question 4: How does the COMO foundation differentiate between projects to support in terms of what is a good fit for CSR or for a social investment?

Ming Tan:

CSR should be focused on sustainability- it should have very specific aims. Whereas the work the foundation supports is led by aligning with where the greatest needs are.

Question 5: Will CSR budgets drop should there be another financial market crisis?

Jonathan Cheng

These are “curious times” – CSR budgets will not necessarily be dropped – instead this will be a time to measure which corporations are truly committed to a project. CSR is becoming more integrated this is an evolutionary time- when there is a realization that CSR is “good for business”.

Question 6: What are some best practices for evaluating grant applications?

Ming Tan:

Instead of writing another report- use a recently filed report which was done for the largest funder of an existing project- don't waste time on endless reporting. Be flexible.

Melissa Kwee:

NVPC invests in intermediaries where possible to build up operations regarding opportunities for CSR.