

# Founders setting the pace in corporate giving

**Charity Canva, Cotton On and Atlassian helped lift funds donated by the top 50 business philanthropists to \$1.7 billion, writes Sally Patten.**

**F**ounder-led businesses have developed a reputation for taking a long-term view of the corporate landscape, reinvesting profits and thinking hard before they part with precious capital.

They are also beginning to develop a reputation for giving. Last year, three founder-led companies – design software maker Canva, clothing retailer Cotton On and collaboration software group Atlassian – were among the top 20 corporate philanthropists, donating more to charity than the likes of Wesfarmers, QBE Insurance, IAG, Qantas and Transurban.

In the year to December 2023, Canva distributed \$31.6 million for disadvantaged people through the Canva Foundation, which was established in mid-2020 with a donation from co-founders Melanie Perkins, Cliff Obrecht and Cameron Adams.

The amount donated in the past year is more than double the \$14.7 million given away in the previous year, and is likely to keep rising given Perkins and Obrecht have pledged to give 80 per cent of their fortune to the Canva Foundation.

Atlassian, founded by Mike Cannon-Brookes and Scott Farquhar, donated \$22.6 million, up from \$17.1 million last time, mainly to education-related causes, while Cotton On, founded by Nigel Austin in 1991, gave away \$29.1 million in 2024.

The increase in giving programs by the founder-led businesses, as well as by supermarket chains Coles and Woolworths, pushed the amount of funds donated by the top 50 corporate philanthropists to \$1.7 billion in 2023-24, the annual The Australian Financial Review Corporate Philanthropy 50 list shows.

The Corporate Philanthropy 50 list is compiled by John McLeod, co-founder of JBWere Philanthropic Services, and Jarrod Miles, the founder of Strive Philanthropy.

"It has been another impressive year of growth in corporate community investment. Overall, the growth has been across the board, rather than being driven by just a couple of large increases. Seventy per cent of companies showed an increase," McLeod says.

Miles says: "This year also saw a prominent appearance from a growing list of newer industry companies such as Canva, Atlassian, Humanix and Who Gives A Crap, which are approaching the relationship between philanthropy and business as an even more core part of their DNA."

The Cotton On Foundation was established in 2007. The foundation raises funds from the proceeds of a raft of products sold by Cotton On, such as tote bags, mints, wipes and hand sanitiser, and distributes the money to charity.

The collection model was designed to make it possible for young people to donate.

"[For young people] you have got to make giving easy. We don't ask for \$50

or \$100 donations. It's an average of \$3 that they contribute," says Tim Diamond, general manager of the Cotton On Foundation.

Cotton On has surveyed its global customers, whose average age is 21, to find out where they would like the funds to be spent. The answer is education, the environment and health.

For education, Cotton On supports close to 30 villages in southern Uganda, where 15,000 students have been through schools funded by the foundation. The retailer, which operates 1400 stores globally, has since developed similar programs in South Africa and Thailand, on the Myanmar border.

Diamond says the intention is to survey customers every three years to check their donation preferences. Cotton On has just completed its latest survey.

"We think that's a good cycle to understand, especially from a youth perspective, where things change rapidly," Diamond says.

"[We are thinking] what does it look like in terms of our investment over the next three years? We believe we will probably raise and contribute about \$70 million over the next three years. So it's a pivotal time to look at, where is that \$70 million best placed?"

Telstra donated \$64.5 million in the 12 months to June 2024, a 60 per cent increase on the year before, making the telco one of the top 10 corporate givers on this year's list.

## Gifts of product and employee time volunteering can also have significant community impact.

Jarrod Miles, Strive Philanthropy

Justine Rowe, Telstra's chief sustainability officer, attributes the rise to higher community need, an increase in the frequency and severity of natural disasters, and the expansion of the company's strategic partnerships.

The telco is also "better positioned to measure employees' engagement and participation in the programs and the support they give", Rowe says, adding that employees care about the group's philanthropic activities.

"They take pride in working for a company that prioritises social investment and are motivated by the positive impact their contributions can make."

The top corporate donor last year was mining behemoth BHP, which distributed \$209 million, or 0.85 per cent of its pre-tax profit, in the year to June.

Coles and Woolworths made outsized contributions to philanthropic causes, donating \$178 million and \$143 million respectively, equal to more than 10 per cent of pre-tax profits.

The figure includes surplus food sent to charities such as OzHarvest.

"These donations are having a big

## Giving back

The top 50 corporate philanthropists in 2024

Company	Community investment (\$m)	Proportion pre-tax profit (%)	Period (12-month ending)	Main areas of giving
1 BHP	208.5	0.85	Jun 24	Decarbonisation, thriving communities, Indigenous
2 Coles	178.1	11.03	Jun 24	Food rescue, disaster relief, education, health
3 Woolworths	143.3	16.36	Jun 24	Food access, children's wellbeing, disaster relief
4 Rio Tinto	126.4	0.61	Dec 23	Community infrastructure, culture, health, wellbeing
5 NAB	86.0	0.87	Sep 24	Disaster recovery, climate, Indigenous, housing, sport
6 CSL	69.1	1.34	Jun 24	Health, innovation, science, local communities
7 Telstra	64.5	2.62	Jun 24	Digital inclusion, environment, disadvantaged, disaster relief
8 Santos	59.0	2.16	Dec 23	Local community, health, education
9 Westpac	57.0	0.56	Sep 24	Social enterprise, financial inclusion, education, children, crisis relief
10 CBA	55.0	0.40	Jun 24	Wellbeing, health, Indigenous support, education
11 Macquarie	47.2	0.98	Mar 24	Barriers to employment, diversity, community sport
12 Southern Cross Media	46.0	-	Jun 24	Food access, child health, health, medical research
13 Bendigo & Adelaide Bank	41.2	5.17	Jun 24	Arts, diversity, infrastructure, education, environment, health
14 South32	36.0	-	Jun 24	Education, leadership, wellbeing, economic participation, environment
15 Woodside	32.5	0.67	Dec 23	Environment, education, employment
16 Canva Foundation	31.4	-	Dec 23	Financial disadvantage
17 Cotton On Foundation	29.1	-	Jun 24	Education, mental health, environment, Indigenous
18 ANZ	28.1	0.29	Sep 24	Financial wellbeing, housing, environmental sustainability
19 Atlassian	22.6	-	Jun 24	Education
20 Wesfarmers	22.4	0.62	Jun 24	Medical research, wellbeing, education, arts
21 EY Australia	20.4	-	Jun 24	Education, environment, entrepreneurs, Indigenous, mental health
22 Optus	18.0	-	Jun 24	Education, disadvantaged
23 Deloitte Australia	16.5	-	May 24	Climate, education, Indigenous, equality, health, disaster relief, animals
24 Brambles	14.3	0.83	Jun 24	Food security, food waste, environmental restoration, education
25 Goodman	13.5	-	Jun 24	Disadvantaged, wellbeing, education, employment, disaster relief
26 Mirvac	13.0	-	Jun 24	Welfare, environment, reconciliation, human rights
27 QBE	12.4	0.45	Dec 23	Equality, sustainable cities
28 PwC Australia	11.8	-	Jun 24	Disaster relief, homelessness, for purpose sector capacity
29 Future Generation	10.7	-	Dec 23	Youth at risk, youth mental health
30 Suncorp	10.4	0.59	Jun 24	Hazard resilience, emergency relief, road safety education
31 Hearts and Minds Inv.	10.1	14.07	Jun 24	Medical research
32 Humanix	10.0	-	Jun 24	Healthcare, accessibility, education, basic needs, environment
33 Sargents Pies Foundation	10.0	-	Jun 24	Children's hospital care
34 KPMG Australia	9.8	-	Jun 24	Equality, climate action, resilient communities, reconciliation
35 IAG	9.8	0.66	Jun 24	Disaster and community resilience
36 Colonial Foundation	9.2	-	Jun 23	Medical research, education, advancing regional and rural Australia
37 Mineral Resources	8.0	7.65	Jun 24	Health, education, social and public welfare
38 Sonic Healthcare	7.1	0.97	Jun 24	Reconciliation, employment, emergency relief, medical research
39 Fortescue	6.9	0.05	Jun 24	Wellness, education, development, environment, arts
40 GPT Group	6.4	-	Dec 23	Child wellbeing, youth homelessness, mental health
41 The Lottery Corporation	6.2	0.94	Jun 24	Health, arts, education, social welfare
42 Northern Star	6.1	0.66	Jun 24	Community, wellness, environment, Indigenous, education
43 AGL	6.0	0.52	Jun 24	Energy literacy and affordability, financial assistance
44 Qantas	5.9	0.31	Jun 24	Reconciliation, communities, disaster relief, arts, sports
45 Crown Resorts Foundation	5.0	-	Jun 24	Youth and education, arts, medical research
46 Who Gives A Crap	4.7	50.00	Jun 23	Water, sanitation, hygiene
47 Orica	4.0	0.54	Sep 24	Health, education, social and public welfare, environment
48 Aristocrat	4.0	0.24	Sep 23	Children, medical research, disability, education
49 Charter Hall	3.7	-	Jun 24	Employment and education for young Australians, hardship
50 Transurban	3.7	0.97	Jun 24	Social and environment, road safety, communities

\* Excluding foregone revenue based on sector averages

SOURCE: GVINGLARGE, JARRODMILES, JOHN MCLEOD



Cotton On Foundation general manager Tim Diamond (above), Telstra's Justine Rowe (top right) and Canva founders Cliff Obrecht, Cameron Adams and Melanie Perkins. PHOTOS: EAMON GALLGHER, GETTY

impact on the community through organisations like OzHarvest, SecondBite and FoodBank, dedicated to feeding people in need," Miles says. "This large proportion of 'in kind' donations, compared to more direct cash by others, shows as a bigger percentage of pre-tax profit."

McLeod adds: "Gifts of product and employee time volunteering can also

have significant community impact. Companies should be looking to commit various resources to communities, depending on their needs and what companies have to contribute from either assets, income or expertise."

Three of the big four accounting firms recorded a drop in their giving programs last year as they were hit by lower demand for advisory services

from public sector clients and large corporate clients.

PwC distributed \$11.8 million to charitable programs, down from \$12.4 million, KPMG gave away \$9.8 million, down from \$12.9 million, and Deloitte distributed \$16.5 million, against \$19.2 million last year. Only EY bucked the trend, donating \$20.4 million, up from \$18.8 million. **A33**