UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF EU-PHILANTHROPY COLLABORATION IN HORIZON EUROPE

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December 2025

SUMMARY

Philanthropy plays a crucial role in funding academic and applied research and innovation (R&I). Philanthropic foundations are widely recognised for their administrative flexibility, lighter reporting requirements, strong support across the entire lab-to-market pathway, and the agility and expertise they bring to project selection and monitoring. As the next Framework Programme for R&I takes shape, philanthropy is emerging as a key partner in helping the EU achieve its scientific and innovation objectives: this goes way beyond financial resources: to the contrary, it is about expertise, agility, and impact acceleration.

This study reviews past EU–philanthropy research collaborations and identifies the challenges that have limited their impact, drawing on desk research and semi-structured interviews. Key lessons and recommendations include: formalising EU–philanthropy cooperation; integrating a dedicated article into the FP10 regulation to enable Public–Philanthropic Co-Funding Partnerships; promoting joint and hybrid financing models; launching a dedicated 'Philanthropy Co-Investment Fund' or matching facility within (or even outside) Horizon Europe; expanding the Seal of Excellence mechanism; pursuing broader administrative simplification; and strengthening links between Horizon Europe and the forthcoming Global Europe Fund in the post-2028 budget cycle.

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This report has been produced as part of a research project funded by the Wellcome Trust.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, the EU has progressively opened its Research and Innovation (R&I) Framework Programmes (FPs) to a broader spectrum of partners. Among these, philanthropic organisations have emerged as increasingly relevant actors (EESC, 2019). Defined as 'foundations, corporate funders and individuals using their own financial and non-financial resources for the public good'[1], philanthropy in Europe has traditionally played a more marginal role compared with what happens in countries such as the US[2].

Philanthropic foundations in Europe are also very heterogeneous. They include a limited number of large-scale 'research foundations', or entities that fund R&I; enterprise foundations that own companies or entire groups; foundations tied to political parties; and a large number of relatively small endowments with operations that focus on specific geographical areas in Europe, often at the local level. https://www.fondationdefrance.org/images/pdf/Philanthropy_in_Europe_april_2015.pdfThe involvement of philanthropy in the EU's R&I programme has historically been minimal, with only limited access to formal funding mechanisms.

Yet, according to the Philanthropy Europe Association (Philea), philanthropic organisations might bring strengths that could enhance the EU's research ecosystem: flexible capital, mission-driven investment, and a long-term perspective that complements the European Commission's more structured, policy-oriented approach (Philea, 2024). This is going to be even more the case in the upcoming FP, again named Horizon Europe, since the available resources may have to cater to many different policy priorities. That in turn may leave room for more ambitious and structured partnerships between the EU and other donors, be they public or private (Dell'Aquila et al., 2025).

High-level EU advisers have long recognised the potential of closer partnerships. For example, the Commission's 2017 Lab-Fab-App report (by the Lamy High Level Group) urged the promotion of co-funding mechanisms with foundations at both the EU and national levels and advocated joint investment in mission-driven research through simple, flexible co-funding models (European Commission, 2017). This recommendation led to a first wave of initiatives within EU institutions, which seem to have only partially led to substantial results.

This report presents the current state and prospects for EU–philanthropy cooperation, with the benefit of a number of interviews with a diverse range of philanthropies and

[1] This study does not always explicitly differentiate institutional philanthropy, which is funded by public institutions, public lottery or charities, from private philanthropy, which is funded by corporations or families. In practice, the two types of philanthropy may differ in their approaches and priorities but the boundary is sometimes blurred.

[2] See the Appendix.

foundations[3]. It traces developments from the proposed European Foundation Statute (EFS) in 2012 to the current Horizon Europe FP. The report then outlines existing mechanisms and collaboration models, highlighting their strengths, weaknesses, and untapped potential. A series of case studies illustrates concrete examples of EU–philanthropy cooperation and the lessons learned from these experiences. Finally, the report concludes with policy recommendations to guide future actions in designing the next FP.

[3] For the study, we conducted five interviews with philanthropic actors and foundations, each differing in size and scope. The interviews took place over three weeks in November 2025. A description of the study, general guidelines for the interview, and a set of guiding questions were shared with each interviewee beforehand. All interviews were conducted online.

2. TWO DECADES OF ATTEMPTS TO STRENGTHEN EU–PHILANTHROPY COOPERATION

EU institutions have long been aware of the potential for philanthropies to amplify the impact of EU R&I funds. In the mid-2000s, amid growing awareness of philanthropy's contribution to research funding, the European Commission convened high-profile discussions on leveraging private giving for science. A landmark conference in 2006, entitled 'Giving More for Research in Europe: Strengthening the Role of Philanthropy in the Financing of Research', highlighted both the scale of foundation investment in R&D and the hurdles to cross-border giving (European Commission, 2006).

Throughout FP7 (2007–2013) and Horizon 2020 (2014–2020), the Commission experimented with involving foundations in specific projects and dialogues, albeit on an ad hoc basis. For example, foundations participated in the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) COFUND schemes to co-sponsor research fellowships, and philanthropic organisations led or joined consortia in EU projects targeting societal challenges. One notable FP7 project, Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) Tools, was coordinated by the "la Caixa" Foundation (LCF) with partners like the King Baudouin Foundation and Fondazione Cariplo to engage the public and researchers in RRI training across Europe. Such early interactions demonstrated mutual interest but also underscored the absence of a systematic framework for cooperation.

2.1. EARLY ATTEMPTS: THE RISE AND FALL OF THE EUROPEAN FOUNDATION STATUTE

A significant obstacle historically was the fragmented legal environment for philanthropy in Europe. Foundations are creatures of national law; variations in legal definitions, fiscal regimes and administrative requirements made cross-border or EU-wide initiatives cumbersome. Recognising this, in 2012 the European Commission proposed an EFS to provide an optional, supranational legal form for public-benefit foundations. Using today's terminology, one would consider it a '28th regime' for foundations. The EFS aimed to ease cross-border philanthropic activities by creating a single European legal personality with equal tax treatment, applicable to qualifying foundations with a minimum of EUR 25 000 in assets. The rationale was to reduce duplication of registrations and compliance costs (then estimated at up to EUR 100 million annually across Europe) and thereby free more funds for public benefit.

Despite support from the philanthropic sector, the EFS proposal was ultimately withdrawn in 2014 amid Member State reluctance. On January 2015, the Commission confirmed its withdrawal in the 2015 work programme, following its failure to pass through the Committee of Permanent Representatives 1. This left in place the existing heterogeneity of national laws, which implies that foundations still face legal and fiscal barriers when operating transnationally. This in turn can represent a challenge for any structured partnership with EU institutions.

2.2. EU–philanthropy cooperation during Horizon 2020

Throughout the 2010s, policy dialogue continued via networks like the European Foundation Centre (EFC) – now merged into Philea (Philanthropy Europe Association) – which served as a voice for institutional philanthropy in Brussels. The EFC's thematic forums (e.g. Research Forum) and annual 'EuroPhilantopics' meetings provided platforms for foundations and EU officials to explore collaboration in areas from science to social inclusion. Notably, in 2018 the EFC coordinated with Directorate-General for Research & Innovation (DG RTD) on an Expert Group on Venture Philanthropy and Social Investments, which produced recommendations for enabling philanthropy's role in research (Philea, 2023c).

Around the same time as the EU was designing its post-2020 R&I programme (Horizon Europe, or FP9), foundations contributed inputs on how to better engage philanthropic funders. An internal discussion paper on 'Foundations and FP9' articulated principles and models for partnership, reflecting consultations with the sector (European Commission, 2018). The paper highlighted foundations' significant R&I spending and examples of past cooperation, but also candidly catalogued constraints impeding deeper joint work. It became a reference point for advocacy, alongside the European Philanthropy Manifesto (2019) – a civil society call for a 'Single Market for Philanthropy' in Europe (Philea, 2019). The Manifesto's recommendations (updated in 2024) urged EU policymakers to remove barriers to cross-border philanthropy, enable co-investment, and recognise philanthropy in EU initiatives (Philea, 2023b). These historical efforts set the stage for the more proactive stance on philanthropy that the EU has adopted in recent years.

That said, during Horizon 2020 philanthropic participation was largely informal and project-based, as confirmed by our interviews with a diverse range of stakeholders from the philanthropy sector. Any legal entity (e.g. university, research institute, public body or private industry, including SMEs and non-profit organisations) established in an EU Member State or country associated with Horizon 2020 could apply for funding under its calls – subject to the specific call's rules (which may include specific requirements for consortium size, number of countries, thematic eligibility, etc.). While non-profit organisations were eligible to join project consortia, there were no dedicated provisions or instruments to systematically involve philanthropic capital foundations[4].

[4] See Regulation (EU) No 1291/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing Horizon 2020 – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2014-2020) and repealing Decision No 1982/2006/EC Text with EEA relevance, OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, pp. 104–173.

2.2.1. Cooperation on large-scale 'orchestration schemes'

By the early 2020s, the urgency of global challenges such as climate change and the Covid-19 pandemic further underscored the value of public–philanthropic collaboration. Foundations took bold action during the Covid-19 pandemic (e.g. funding vaccine research and equitable access), often alongside government donors. The EU worked with philanthropic partners in mechanisms like the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), to which the Commission became a funder in pursuit of vaccine development. Although CEPI is a global public–philanthropic partnership outside the EU framework, the Commission's engagement with it revealed both possibilities and frictions. Commission officials acknowledged 'difficulties in engaging in partnership under CEPI' due to misaligned indicators and geographical rules, which slowed collaboration despite shared goals. Nonetheless, it demonstrated the Commission's willingness to join forces with foundations on urgent global health objectives. And the possibility for EU institutions to meaningfully engage in multi-stakeholder, mission-driven partnerships, sometimes described as 'orchestration schemes' in the academic literature (Abbott et al. 2012; Renda et al. 2024).

This experience, among others, contributed to an evolution in EU policy thinking: rather than viewing foundations merely as grant beneficiaries or ad hoc co-funders, they began to be seen as strategic partners in designing and delivering policy initiatives. This shift is evident in recent statements by EU leaders. For example, in June 2025 the Director-General of the DG for International Partnerships (INTPA) reportedly affirmed that 'foundations at local and global level are very welcome as partners … we have collaborated already and we can develop collaborations further – they can play a crucial role at local and global level' (Philea, 2025a). Such high-level endorsement reflects a convergence of historical trends – from the early dialogues and legal proposals to practical joint initiatives – towards a new paradigm where philanthropic contributions are systematically integrated into EU programmes (see Box 1).

Box 1. The pilot European Social Catalyst Fund

Despite the difficulties already mentioned, Horizon 2020 piloted early initiatives demonstrating the potential of combining public and philanthropic funding. For example, the European Social Catalyst Fund (ESCF) was an initiative 'designed to have significant impact on some of Europe's most pressing social challenges', co-funded by Horizon 2020 and three philanthropies: Genio (Ireland), the Robert Bosch Stiftung (Germany) and the King Baudouin Foundation (Belgium). This pioneering initiative, which ran from January 2020 to December 2021, encouraged wider collaboration among the public sector, philanthropic organisations, and social investors to expand effective social service innovations that address social issues across EU Member States. Its objective was to combine public and private resources to enhance social services, empowering people who need support to live with dignity and actively participate in their communities (Philea, 2020)[5].

2.2.2. Public–private partnerships in R&I

Horizon 2020 marked a stronger recognition of the benefits of closer collaboration between EU institutions and philanthropic actors. In legal terms, Article 25 of the programme's regulation enabled public–private partnerships (PPPs), primarily envisaged for industry collaboration in joint R&I undertakings. These PPPs could be 'institutionalised' (via joint entities under Article 187 of the Treaty on the Function of the European Union) or 'contractual' arrangements defining specific commitments.

However, the criteria and timelines of these partnerships were designed around large industry consortia, which were ill suited to foundations. For example, PPP key performance indicators often focused on industrial competitiveness, and establishing a PPP took considerable capacity – effectively limiting participation to solely the largest, multinational foundations that could match such commitments. That said, some foundations did engage: the Innovative Medicines Initiative 2 (IMI2), a PPP in health, accepted foundations as 'associate partners' in projects, and indeed the Wellcome Trust and others joined IMI research consortia on antimicrobial resistance and vaccines.

Another potential route in Horizon 2020 was provided by Articles 26-27, allowing 'co-fund' mechanisms and 'joint calls' with international organisations or non-EU countries, but not explicitly with private foundations. This omission was a legal wrinkle – since most foundations are private entities, they were not directly covered by the joint call provisions except by being affiliated with eligible international bodies. As a result, innovative workarounds emerged, like designating a foundation as an 'international partner' or leveraging the foundation's parallel calls rather than truly pooling funds.

[5] The ESCF awarded grants to projects on social challenges across the EU Member States.

2.2.3. The Expert Group on Foundations, Venture Philanthropy and Social Investments

In 2017, the European Commission's DG RTD established an Expert Group on Foundations, Venture Philanthropy and Social Investments to engage with foundations and philanthropists. It aimed at encouraging them to collaborate with other partners to enhance the impact of the EU's knowledge economy (European Commission Expert Group on Foundations, Venture Philanthropy and Social Investments, 2018).

Despite these initiatives, the role of philanthropic actors in Horizon 2020 remained limited. The programme's complex administrative procedures and strict co-funding and audit requirements often clashed with the more flexible funding approaches of foundations. In fact, the Expert Group's final report observes that

> *the current framework for public-private partnerships within Horizon 2020 has ill-fitting criteria for foundations and long lead times more suited to industry, something which makes it harder for foundations to take part in such collaborations. Since it is usually the case that each public-private partnership between the EU and a public-benefit foundation is crafted specifically for that specific collaboration, the process is time-consuming and administratively burdensome for both the EC and the foundation. The process might also exclude smaller foundations, regardless of their expertise, if they lack the administrative resources it requires*[6].

All in all, the lack of formal recognition for philanthropies as institutionalised partners, as well as systemic legal, administrative, and cross-border barriers (Plantamura et al., 2024), further limited their participation in Horizon 2020 (Philea, 2024).

2.3. MECHANISMS AND COLLABORATION MODELS UNDER HORIZON EUROPE

The current FP, Horizon Europe, marked a qualitative shift in the EU's approach to EU–philanthropy partnerships and introduced mechanisms that explicitly invite the co-funding and participation of foundations in mission-oriented and co-funded programmes[7].

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[6] See the European Commission Expert Group on Foundations, Venture Philanthropy and Social Investments (2018), p. 19.

[7] See Recital 36 of the Regulation (EU) 2021/695 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 April 2021 establishing Horizon Europe – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, laying down its rules for participation and dissemination, and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1290/2013 and (EU) No 1291/2013:

In order for Union funding to have the greatest possible impact and to make the most effective contribution to the Union's policy objectives and commitments, it should be possible for the Union to enter into European Partnerships with private and/or public sector partners. Such partners include industry, SMEs, universities, research organisations, R&I stakeholders, bodies with a public service mission at local, regional, national or international level or civil society organisations, including foundations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that support and/or carry out R&I, provided that the desired impacts can be achieved more effectively in partnership than by the Union alone.

By including 'foundations' in the definition of European Partnerships (Article 2(3)), the EU formally recognised their role as strategic actors within the EU R&I landscape.

Horizon Europe's co-funded European Partnerships (Pillar II) provide a channel for philanthropies to cooperate alongside Member States and private actors. According to the European Commission, these partnerships may include 'foundations and other non-profit organisations' as co-investors and strategic partners (ERA-Learn, 2024). The Commission's impact assessment explicitly stated that European Partnerships under the programme 'will be open to all types of stakeholders (e.g. industry, Member States and philanthropic foundations)'. This policy shift acknowledged foundations as potential co-designers and co-funders of partnerships alongside public and private sectors.

Accordingly, Horizon Europe introduced the notion of 'contributing partners' in its partnership model, allowing entities like foundations to contribute resources (financial or in-kind) to joint R&I initiatives without necessarily being formal signatories of the basic partnership agreement. The practical effect is seen in partnerships such as the Innovative Health Initiative (IHI) – successor to the IMI – which explicitly encouraged philanthropic organisations to partake. Indeed, by 2025 IHI had launched calls on several topics where foundations joined forces with industry and the Commission. As IHI contributing partners, entities like the Wellcome Trust, Novo Nordisk Foundation, and Gates Ventures co-designed calls aligned with their missions and committed funding to projects on mental health, diabetes, and infectious diseases. These partners could shape the research agenda and leverage IHI's large-scale collaboration platform while advancing their philanthropic objectives. This emerging public–private–philanthropic partnership (4P) model represents a notable evolution in the legal-policy toolkit for Horizon Europe.

Despite such progress, gaps remain in the formal framework. One critical issue is the Commission's limited ability to receive funds directly from foundations to augment EU programmes. The EU budget is not easily co-mingled with private donations due to accountability and budgeting rules, except through special vehicles. A notable example is GENDER-NET Plus, a Horizon 2020-era co-funded partnership on gender in research, which included LCF as the sole non-public funding partner among 16 organisations. Some foundations struggled to join such partnerships due to eligibility rules requiring a public mandate or certain legal status.

However, in the realm of external action, the EU has introduced mechanisms like EU Trust Funds and blended finance instruments where third-party contributions (including from foundations) can be channelled alongside EU funds. For instance, under the External Investment Plan (2017–2020), the Commission established the European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD) – a guarantee facility for development investments. The Gates Foundation became the first philanthropic organisation to contribute to the EFSD, committing EUR 54 million to support health diagnostics in Africa. This collaboration, announced by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and Bill Gates in 2018, effectively created an EU guarantee co-funded by philanthropy to unlock private investment in laboratory services for diseases like tuberculosis, HIV, and malaria[8].

Moreover, the Commission has been able to enter into framework partnership agreements or memoranda of understanding (MoUs) with private foundations to structure cooperation without immediate financial exchange. A prominent example is the MoU signed in 2017 between the European Commission and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in the field of global health and development. The MoU set out a consultative relationship whereby the two entities would 'discuss projects of common interest' in areas like poverty-related diseases and pandemic preparedness. While not legally binding funding-wise, this MoU paved the way for coordinated actions such as the Birth Day Prize – a joint challenge prize on maternal health where the Commission, Gates Foundation, and Merck each funded a EUR 1 million award for innovations to reduce maternal and newborn mortality. Notably, each partner paid its own prize independently (no pooling of funds), but the competition was run collaboratively, illustrating a pragmatic model within existing rules. Similarly, the Commission has signed MoUs or statements of intent with other foundations (e.g. with the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation on scientific cooperation), politically signalling the importance of collaboration even if the legal integration of funds remains complex.

On the policy side, the European Research Area framework increasingly recognises the role of stakeholder organisations (including civil society and possibly foundations) in contributing to R&I governance and implementation. The Pact for R&I explicitly endorses the goal of raising (public and private) R&D investment to 3% of EU GDP. The ERA Policy Agenda 2025–2027 further calls for an active and broad involvement of stakeholders and a greater representation of different interests.

The Commission's 2021 Social Economy Action Plan had promised measures to 'unlock the potential of philanthropy' as part of strengthening Europe's social economy. This led to the adoption in 2023 of a Council Recommendation on developing social economy framework conditions, which includes specific recommendations to Member States regarding foundations and philanthropy[9]. More specifically, it urges Member States to create an enabling environment for philanthropy by providing tax incentives (e.g.

[8] Structurally, the majority of Gates's contribution (EUR 43.2 million) was allocated into the EFSD Guarantee Fund, leveraging additional capital for development, while a portion (EUR 10.8 million) went to a Commission-managed technical assistance programme for e-health innovations. This arrangement was enabled by a bespoke agreement under the EFSD Regulation and demonstrates that, under the right conditions, the Commission can indeed blend foundation funding with EU instruments in development cooperation.

[9] See Council of the EU, Council Recommendation of 27 November 2023 on developing social economy framework conditions.

corporate tax exemptions for foundation income and income tax deductions for donors) and simplifying cross-border donations (including a standardised certificate for foreign public-benefit organisations based in the EU). It also encourages governments to facilitate co-investment and partnerships with philanthropic actors as part of social economy strategies.

While a Council Recommendation is not legally binding, its issuance with strong support for philanthropy marks an important shift in EU policy discourse: the Commission is effectively calling on national governments to ease legal obstacles (like discriminatory tax treatment or burdensome registration processes) that have hindered foundations from operating freely across Europe. This soft-law instrument complements the EU's own efforts to reduce barriers at the EU level. Among them is exploring a potential legal form of European association (for non-profit associations) that in the future could be extended to foundations, and revisiting cross-border VAT and anti-money laundering rules that impact philanthropic funding flows (Philea, 2023a).

2.3.1. Available instruments and coordination mechanisms under Horizon Europe

As a result of the gradual openness shown by the Commission to cooperation with foundations under Horizon Europe, a number of coordination mechanisms have been established, as outlined below.

- **European Partnerships (co-funded, co-programmed, and institutionalised)**

  - Under the co-funded European Partnerships, consortia of research funders (mostly national agencies) and other partners implement joint research calls with EU co-financing. In practice, a foundation can join such a consortium as a partner providing cash or in-kind contributions to the call budget. Horizon Europe's partnerships have made some inroads, especially in the domain of public and global health. The European & Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP) allowed contributions from foundations and non-EU countries already under Horizon 2020 (EDCTP2). One EDCTP project, PReDICT-TB, exemplified this synergy and its prospective impact[10]. By pooling efforts, EDCTP leveraged each funder's strength (EU funds for core trial costs, foundation funds for ancillary support and broader reach). EDCTP3 now continues this model on a bigger scale.

  - Another Horizon Europe partnership, the IHI, shows how the co-programmed partnership model can facilitate the engagement of foundations. In the IHI,

[10] EDCTP2 granted EUR 7.7 million while the Gates Foundation, US National Institutes of Health, and others contributed an additional EUR 18+ million to cover complementary aspects of the tuberculosis research. The Gulbenkian Foundation also provided EUR 0.5 million via EDCTP2 to support trial sites in Lusophone Africa.

foundations are not formal members of the Joint Undertaking but can become Contributing Partners to specific call topics. In 2022–2025, the IHI launched calls on mental health and advanced therapies co-designed with foundations: Wellcome Trust co-led the drafting of a call on mental health biomarkers, aligning it with Wellcome's mission to improve early intervention for anxiety and depression. The Novo Nordisk Foundation contributed to a call examining the links between infectious and chronic diseases. Gates Ventures (a programmatic investment company of Bill Gates focused on Alzheimer's research) joined IHI topics on neurodegeneration.

These instances illustrate how Horizon Europe partnerships can serve as platforms for strategic alignment: foundations bring topical expertise and funds, the Commission provides a large collaborative infrastructure and additional financing, and industry/academia bring implementation capacity. The partnership essentially acts as a neutral convening space where diverse resources are coordinated towards a shared R&I challenge (IHI, 2025). Success here is measured not just in terms of money leveraged but in the collective impact – for example, enabling multi-country clinical trials or data platforms that a foundation alone could not easily achieve – while giving foundations influence in steering EU research agendas in line with societal needs.

Missions and other Horizon Europe initiatives

- Horizon Europe introduced EU Missions for R&I – ambitious, time-bound goals on cancer, climate adaptation, oceans, climate-neutral cities, and soil health. From the outset, the missions were conceived as a tool to mobilise not only EU funds but also national, local, and private contributions (Mazzucato, 2019). In implementation, each mission area has sought engagement with foundations. For instance, the Cancer Mission board included representatives with philanthropic backgrounds to advise on leveraging charitable funding for cancer R&D and patient support. The Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission has attracted interest from city-focused foundations; a report found that philanthropic foundations in Europe were beginning to align their grants to support cities striving for the mission's 2030 climate-neutral goal (Anfossi et al., 2025). While formal co-funding of missions by foundations is still nascent, Horizon Europe's mission approach explicitly invites philanthropic pledges[11].

[11] An example can be seen in the Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change: in 2021, the European Climate Foundation and several climate philanthropies publicly endorsed the EU Cities Mission and signalled willingness to assist cities with technical assistance and advocacy. The mission's inclusive governance model – with 'mission assemblies' and platforms – allows foundation involvement in advisory roles, co-design of mission activities, and coordination of investments. Similarly, the Soil Health Mission interacts with environmental philanthropies concerned with land restoration. These

Another example of such collaboration is the European Social Catalyst Fund, which builds directly on the above-mentioned Horizon 2020 ESCF pilot (see Box 1 above). This new fund seeks to mobilise philanthropists and private capital in support of EU Missions, focusing on social and environmental innovation. The call explicitly identifies foundations and charities as co-funders, recognising their capacity to bridge funding gaps and sustain initiatives beyond the EU's budgetary cycles.

A further noteworthy mechanism of Horizon Europe is the **European Innovation Council (EIC)**, which supports breakthrough startups and research. While the EIC is primarily a grant and equity funder, it has explored synergies with impact-focused investors and philanthropists for its 'blended finance' projects. For example, in the EIC's ScalingUp portfolio, companies tackling global challenges (like clean energy in developing countries) have attracted co-investment from philanthropic impact funds after initial EIC support. The Commission could facilitate more structured matchmaking between EIC-funded innovators and foundations seeking to fund scalable solutions in health, climate, etc., as part of Horizon Europe's ecosystem-building.

- **Seal of Excellence (SoE) and aligned funding** are practical mechanisms enabling foundations to support Horizon Europe objectives. The SoE is a quality label awarded by the Commission to proposals that scored above the threshold in Horizon calls but could not be funded due to budget limits. Launched in Horizon 2020 (first for the SME Instrument, later expanded), the SoE signifies that a project is 'excellent' and encourages alternative funders (national agencies, regions, or private sources) to fund it.

  Foundations have taken an interest in this as a pipeline of vetted projects aligned with their missions. For example, as cited in an FP9 consultation, Compagnia di San Paolo (CdSP) – a Turin-based banking foundation with a local development mandate – decided to use the SoE to identify high-quality research proposals from Piedmont that it could finance, focusing on funding within its region and solely on non-profits. Experience so far highlights how alignment mechanisms like the SoE can reduce duplication and speed up grant-making for foundations.

  Recognising this, the Horizon Europe programme has expanded SoE to more areas (proposals from the European Research Council and additional thematic calls). There are proposals to deepen its use: e.g. accrediting certain trusted foundations to themselves award an SoE on projects they evaluate as having a high standard,

connections remain largely informal to date, but they set a precedent for FP10 to integrate foundations into mission governance more formally, perhaps through partnership instruments or matching schemes.

thereby mutually recognising quality. While not yet realised, this idea indicates a future where the Commission and foundations share evaluation data and perhaps coordinate on funding 'runner-up' projects. For FP10, such aligned funding could be scaled, with the Commission facilitating 'matchmaking' among civil society organisations and philanthropy, as recommended by stakeholders (Philea, 2025c).

- **Joint prize competitions and co-creation,** as demonstrated by the Birth Day Prize experience, are other aspects on which foundations can collaborate with Horizon Europe. Prizes are a flexible mechanism since each partner can contribute separate prize money while jointly designing the competition. Horizon Europe's challenge prize on Early Warning for Epidemics (awarded in 2020) had in its initial conception input from charitable pandemic funds (though it ended up EU-funded). In the future, the Commission could re-run such co-sponsored prizes, leveraging foundations' convening power (e.g. a climate adaptation prize co-sponsored by a climate philanthropy and the Commission's Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change).

  Horizon Europe embraces public and stakeholder co-creation in setting R&I agendas. Foundations, particularly community and civil society-focused ones, have expertise in public engagement that can complement the Commission's efforts. For example, the Meeting of Minds deliberative project was spearheaded by the King Baudouin Foundation to engage people across nine countries on brain research priorities; the Commission's DG Communication later co-financed follow-up public consultations using that methodology. This collaboration avenue – where foundations act as intermediaries between the scientific community, public, and policymakers – may not involve large sums of money but significantly enriches the research process and its societal relevance.

In summary, Horizon Europe has opened multiple channels for collaboration with philanthropy, from structural partnerships to flexible project-level tools. The experience so far suggests that when given the opportunity, foundations do step up to co-invest (as seen in health partnerships and development research) and bring unique value (agility, public linkages, and a long-term outlook) to EU initiatives. However, these mechanisms have been applied unevenly and often rely on bespoke arrangements for each case. There is still no single, streamlined path for a foundation to collaborate with Horizon Europe akin to, say, how an industry partner would via PPPs. This underscores a need for more standardised yet flexible instruments in FP10, building on what has been piloted.

3. Cases of EU–philanthropy collaboration beyond Horizon programmes

3.1. European Commission and Gates Foundation

One of the most prominent public–philanthropic partnerships involving the European Commission has been with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The two actors formalised their cooperation in 2013 through an agreement focused on global health and development, committing to coordinate investments in research on HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and other poverty-related diseases.

Since then, collaboration has taken the form of complementary financing for global health R&D – often channelled through product-development partnerships and initiatives such as the European & Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership – as well as joint advocacy on vaccines, diagnostics, and maternal and child health. The partnership received further backing in 2023, when the European Commission, European Investment Bank (EIB), and the Gates Foundation announced a EUR 1.1 billion financing package to support the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) and broader health-security measures.

This arrangement includes a commitment from the EIB of EUR 500 million in loans for GPEI activities; the Gates Foundation pledged EUR 250 million in grants and catalytic investments to match part of the EIB's contribution (backed by EFSD+ guarantees); and the Commission/EIB allocated an additional EUR 80 million for technical assistance, matched by EUR 40 million from the Foundation. Governance is shared among the Commission, EIB, the Gates Foundation, and implementing agencies such as WHO and UNICEF, with oversight integrated into existing GPEI governance structures.

The outcomes of this cooperation have been significant. EU–Gates joint funding has contributed to pushing wild poliovirus to the brink of eradication – it remains endemic in just two countries – and strengthened immunisation systems that reach hundreds of millions of children annually.

Beyond disease-specific gains, the collaboration has supported health-system resilience and innovations such as local vaccine-manufacturing capacity in Africa under Global Gateway initiatives. In 2024, the Commission, Gates Foundation, and partners also launched a financing mechanism to front-load donor commitments for reproductive-health supplies, using guarantees and philanthropic capital via the UN Population Fund.

The partnership has been successful but has also encountered obstacles. Differences in operating cultures have required deliberate alignment: the Commission's procedures can be slow and compliance-heavy, whereas the Gates Foundation operates with greater flexibility and an outcomes-driven approach (de Bengy Puyallée et al., 2025). Priority setting has also needed careful coordination to ensure that philanthropic interests remain consistent with the EU's strategic objectives and with partner-country needs.

Overall, the EU–Gates Foundation relationship illustrates the benefits of strategic co-investment. By coordinating or matching resources, the two actors have generated a multiplier effect and expanded the scale and speed of global health interventions. This experience offers lessons for FP10: mechanisms that enable structured co-funding with philanthropic organisations can increase the reach of EU programmes, provided governance is clear and aligned with public-interest mandates.

3.2. European Commission and Wellcome Trust

The Commission and Wellcome collaborate through broader international research coalitions and policy mechanisms. A prominent case is their involvement in the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, launched in 2017 with the Wellcome Trust, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and several governments. In 2019, the EU formalised its engagement through a Framework Partnership Agreement with CEPI, thereby becoming a significant funder.

The governance of CEPI involves donor governments and foundations, including Wellcome and the EU, which serve on its board alongside independent experts, allowing Wellcome to contribute to strategic decisions, while CEPI maintains principles such as equitable access. CEPI receives resources from multiple donors, including the European Commission and philanthropic foundations, and decides how to allocate them to research institutions or vaccine developers. EU contributions, however, are subject to Horizon Europe administrative and compliance rules, including reporting, auditing, and eligible-cost requirements. Thus, CEPI functions as a conduit for both EU and foundation funding, allowing strategic coordination across donors while ensuring that each partner's rules and priorities are respected.

Furthermore, the Wellcome Trust, together with the Gates Foundation, endorse the principles of Plan S, joining cOALition S in 2018 with the aim of making the full open access of research work a reality. This represents a less formal partnership: by jointly advocating and adopting the same policy change, the EU and a philanthropic funder have driven a sector-wide shift towards open science. It illustrates how foundations can partner with the Commission on strategic agendas. Wellcome brought a global network of researchers and resources, complementing the Commission's regulatory power within Europe.

In terms of financial arrangements, the interaction between the European Commission and the Wellcome Trust often reflects parallel funding rather than deeply integrated joint mechanisms. For example, during the 2015–2016 Zika virus outbreak, the Commission funded several Horizon 2020 research consortia (ZikaPLAN, ZIKAction and ZikAlliance), while Wellcome independently supported related Zika research via its own grants. In March 2020, in the Covid-19 response, both bodies contributed to the ACT-Accelerator, a multistakeholder global initiative: Wellcome and Unitaid lead the Therapeutics Pillar, and the European Commission hosted, together with the WHO, the Facilitation Council. Although this model – aligning priorities within shared platforms – enables rapid, large-scale mobilisation, it relies on coalitions rather than dedicated bilateral funds.

The outcomes of these collaborations have been noteworthy. For instance, by 2020, CEPI had advanced vaccine candidates targeting at least six epidemic-threat pathogens, among them Lassa, MERS, Nipah, Rift Valley fever and Covid-19. Its rapid-response funding supported early-stage vaccine platforms, playing a critical role in accelerating vaccine development when Covid-19 emerged. CEPI's model is regarded as a successful blending of philanthropic and public agendas to address the lack of commercial incentives for outbreak vaccines.

On the policy front, the Commission and Wellcome have jointly pushed for open-access science. Wellcome fully aligned its open-access policy with the Plan S initiative, which is backed by the European Commission, and now requires its grantees to publish on open-access platforms. The Commission itself has made open access mandatory under its Horizon research programmes and launched the publishing platform Open Research Europe. This convergence has helped to embed open-science norms more strongly into European research funding and beyond.

Even so, here too some issues have emerged. Working across sectors means reconciling very different accountability frameworks; the Commission operates under strict financial regulation and public-interest mandates, whereas philanthropic institutions like Wellcome can pursue more experimental approaches. In CEPI for example, the tension between access and commercial incentives has become evident. CEPI embeds equitable access obligations in its funding agreements, including affordable pricing, intellectual property rights, and step-in clauses. Yet critics have argued that these terms were diluted when the policy was revised. CEPI's original policy imposed strong, prescriptive conditions on pricing and intellectual property. But a study noted that the revised policy introduced more flexibility, allowing CEPI to negotiate terms case by case (Huneycutt et al., 2020). This has raised concerns about whether CEPI can always balance public-interest goals with the realities of working with pharmaceutical developers.

A key lesson is that governance arrangements must institutionalise public-good principles from the outset, so that access commitments are not weakened when market pressure grows. Another lesson concerns long-term commitment: actors like Wellcome, involved in global health partnerships (e.g. CEPI), demonstrate how foundations with consistent missions can provide stability over time.

For future EU research programmes (like FP10), creating structured entry points for long-term philanthropic involvement, such as associate partner roles or co-funded instruments, could help integrate expertise and capital while preserving public values. Such inclusion would bring in additional expertise and funds, while FP10 provides a stable framework and evaluation of results. This would be a win–win as noted by observers who call for 'reducing barriers for international partners and creating mechanisms that welcome co-funding from global donors, including philanthropic actors' (Lenz & Senczyszyn, 2025).

3.3. EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN FOUNDATION

The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (Portugal) is a philanthropic partner dedicated to culture, education, science and social well-being. In cooperation with the European Commission the Foundation has often acted as a strategic convenor and agenda-setter rather than as a large-scale funder of EU programmes.

A prime example is the 2017 conference on 'Opening up to an Era of Social Innovation' in Lisbon (27-28 November), co-organised by the European Commission, the Portuguese government and the Gulbenkian Foundation. The conference aimed to develop a new narrative for social innovation in Europe and to inform the design of the EU framework programme for R&I for 2020–2027. Here the Foundation provided the venue, host-institution and agenda-design support, leveraging its convening power and thought leadership. The thematic scope included social policy innovation, inclusive growth, civil society engagement in R&I and the role of social innovation. The event drew some 1 380 participants from 47 countries (European Commission, Government of Portugal & Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2019). It was governed by a joint organising committee of the partners. The outcome was a set of recommendations and showcased projects feeding into the next FP. This represents a form of public–philanthropic partnership in policy co-creation rather than direct grant funding.

Beyond the 2017 conference, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation has also partnered with European institutions on a range of issues. For instance, the Foundation has launched initiatives on energy poverty in Portugal and contributed to Europe-wide philanthropic-policy networks. Such projects often involve strategic partnerships rather than being purely grant funding collaborations: the Foundation may contribute research, pilot funding in a Member State (e.g. Portugal), or host secretariats for Europe-wide networks, while the Commission integrates the findings into broader policy discussions.

Among the outcomes of these partnerships is a stronger emphasis on social innovation in EU policy. Observers note that the 2017 Lisbon conference 'put social innovation in the spotlight' and helped shape the narrative around social innovation in the 2020–2027 FP. The partnership also facilitated capacity building: by bringing together EU officials, national policymakers, foundations and civil society actors, it spread knowledge of new funding mechanisms and community-based solutions across Europe.

A challenge with this kind of collaboration is ensuring sustained follow-through. Hosting a high-profile joint event is one thing; embedding its recommendations into long-term programmes is another. In this case, a key lesson is that philanthropic actors often work best as catalytic partners – bringing agility, ideas and niche networks – while the scale and continuity of large programmes must be anchored in public budgets and formal EU mechanisms. For future FPs (e.g. FP10), this suggests value in formalising advisory roles for foundations like Gulbenkian at the ideation and design stage, alongside their convening and piloting roles.

3.4. EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND "LA CAIXA" FOUNDATION

Spain's "La Caixa" Foundation (LCF) has engaged in multi-faceted cooperation with the European Commission, blending financial partnership with an operational role in EU programmes. Uniquely, LCF has served as an Intermediate Body for European Structural Funds in Spain, managing and co-financing EU social funding programmes.

During the 2014–2020 period, the Commission entrusted LCF with implementing parts of the European Social Fund (ESF) Operational Programmes on Social Inclusion and Youth Employment. Under this arrangement, LCF launched calls such as the Más Empleo (More Employment) and Empleo Joven (Youth Employment) initiatives, aimed at integrating marginalised groups into the workforce and reducing youth unemployment. The structure here was formalised via delegated management agreements: the foundation handled project selection, monitoring and disbursement of grants to NGOs, social enterprises and companies that hired unemployed youth or vulnerable people, in line with ESF regulations. The financial model was co-funding: the Empleo Joven call had a total budget of EUR 30.8 million, of which 91.9% (EUR 28.3 million) came from the ESF and 8.1% (EUR 2.5 million) was contributed by LCF. Similarly, the Más Empleo programme combined about EUR 30.6 million from the EU with EUR 10.8 million from the Foundation12.

The partnership's governance involved shared oversight: LCF had to abide by EU funding rules and audits, while bringing its technical expertise in social project management. The Foundation's decades of experience in Spain – funding poverty reduction, microcredit,

[12] See the official website for Fundación "la Caixa", Subvenciones y ayudas.

and education – complemented the Commission's financial muscle, allowing tailored interventions in communities.

LCF also designed innovative features like the Responsible Innovation Laboratories within EU projects, and its staff helped reach local civil society actors who might have been less accessible to a government authority. The thematic scope extended to social innovation and R&I as well: for instance, LCF led an FP7 project called RRI Tools (2014–2016) to build an EU-wide toolkit for Responsible Research and Innovation, coordinating 27 institutions. The Commission funded this project with EUR 6.9 million and LCF contributed as the coordinator.

A key lesson from LCF is how a philanthropic foundation can effectively act as an implementation partner for EU funds – a role that might be expanded under FP10 to other willing foundations in Europe. LCF brought co-financing and agility in grant management, which is particularly useful in social programmes requiring close community ties. Hurdles included the administrative burden: as an intermediary, the foundation had to adhere to complex EU procurement and reporting rules, which required building internal capacity. Not all foundations may be equipped for that, so a lesson is that capacity building and clear guidelines are needed if FP10 wishes to encourage more such arrangements. Another obstacle was ensuring additionality – the Commission had to make sure that the Foundation's contribution was truly additive and not simply replacing public funding.

4. EXISTING CHALLENGES

Despite encouraging developments and a working co-funding approach, the potential for involving philanthropic foundations in the EU R&I landscape is still largely untapped. Barriers include legal, administrative, and cultural obstacles, as discussed below.

4.1. REGULATORY CONSTRAINTS AND INFLEXIBLE FUNDING RULES

The Commission is bound by rules ensuring public funds are handled transparently and accountably. For foundations, this translates into formal processes (calls for proposals, contractual grant conditions, and procurement rules) that can be cumbersome. Foundations often operate with more flexible grant making – they may provide rapid-response funding, support less orthodox approaches, or give core funding, none of which aligns easily with EU's project-based funding structures.

Moreover, EU grants must follow frameworks set in the programme regulations, which historically did not envisage private co-funders. Setting up a new partnership or trust fund is time-consuming, often requiring approval by EU co-legislators or Member States. Smaller foundations find it daunting to navigate such processes, effectively excluding them. One interviewee, for example, stressed the importance of accessing very precise information: despite the abundance of available material, what is lacking is clear, tailored, and executive-level guidance.

A primary constraint stems from the EU's rules on cross-border fund transfers. Under EU financial regulations, all EU funds are pooled into a single budget line and managed according to EU budget rules[13]. While donations to EU FPs are permissible, they are subject to EU regulations and procedures, including compliance with EU financial rules, transparency requirements, and adherence to the objectives of the respective programme. This means that the donors will lose control of the use of their donations. Philanthropic organisations may prefer a co-funding approach, in which each donor (including the EU) manages its own fund. Still, this arrangement may require donors to transfer funds from their home country to the beneficiary country. The process will involve daunting administrative steps, including compliance with local registration requirements and adherence to national taxation and accounting regulations (Plantamura et al., 2024).

The complexity of fund transfers increases if beneficiaries intend to redistribute or transfer funds to another entity, either within the same country or abroad. Such actions

[13] See Article 8, Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union, amending Regulations (EU) No 1296/2013, (EU) No 1301/2013, (EU) No 1303/2013, (EU) No 1304/2013, (EU) No 1309/2013, (EU) No 1316/2013, (EU) No 223/2014, (EU) No 283/2014, and Decision No 541/2014/EU and repealing Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012.

may be subject to additional legal and regulatory requirements, including compliance with EU and national laws on cross-border financial transactions. In principle, the creation of separate legal entities could become a solution: for example, Joint Undertakings are legally independent entities, managed separately with their own rules[14]. However, the priorities of Joint Undertakings are managed by the European Commission (with inputs from stakeholders). Such inputs have proven very difficult to fully untap[15]. EU Joint Undertakings are usually complex in their governance structure, as observed inter alia by the European Court of Auditors[16]. The lack of control over the agenda or priorities and the complex governance may discourage philanthropies from participating in these Joint Undertakings.

4.2. INCOMPATIBLE TIMELINES AND PLANNING CYCLES

EU programmes have multi-annual planning, with long lead times (calls are prepared months or years in advance) and often slow disbursement. Foundations, on the other hand, might decide on an opportunity and deploy funds within weeks or have rolling programmes that cannot wait for EU calls. This mismatch can make coordination difficult. For example, by the time a foundation identifies an EU project to top up (say, via an SoE), the project may be ready to start and cannot wait through a long contracting period in order to integrate the foundation's support. Even foundations that are eager to cooperate may hold back if they sense the process will be too slow or cumbersome.

4.3. LEGAL IDENTITY AND DEFINITION ISSUES

There is no common legal definition of 'foundation' at the EU level, as pointed out by one interviewee, complicating their inclusion in EU programmes. Horizon Europe can make it plain that 'philanthropic foundations' are welcome, but in practice the programme has had to set out which entities qualify. Without an EU statute, eligibility is often determined by whether an organisation is a non-profit and acts in the public interest. But national laws vary widely – some 'foundations' are trusts or other associations, some even have for-profit arms – making a one-size definition tricky. The FP9 paper suggested categorising foundations by purpose (public benefit) rather than form. The lack of a legal category also

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[14] Council Regulation (EU) 2021/2085 of 19 November 2021 establishing the Joint Undertakings under Horizon Europe and repealing Regulations (EC) No 219/2007, (EU) No 557/2014, (EU) No 558/2014, (EU) No 559/2014, (EU) No 560/2014, (EU) No 561/2014 and (EU) No 642/2014.

[15] For example, it is reported that the European High-Performance Computing Joint Undertaking only received EUR 18.4 million in contributions against a target of EUR 420 million under Horizon 2020. See *Science Business*, 'Joint undertakings have mixed success in securing private resources', 14 November 2024.

[16] European Parliament resolution of 10 May 2023 with observations forming an integral part of the decision on discharge in respect of the implementation of the budget of the Clean Aviation Joint Undertaking (before 30.11.2021 the Clean Sky 2 Joint Undertaking) for the financial year 2021 (2022/2126(DEC)), Internal control, Point 19.

affects things like liability and VAT: should a foundation contributing to an EU partnership be treated like a state (zero VAT on grants) or like a business?

The absence of a European Foundation Statute means these issues persist. The Commission's new push for a cross-border associations statute is only a partial answer, since many foundations (grant-making entities with assets) might not qualify as associations.

4.4. Fiscal and cross-border barriers

Many of the barriers foundations face in collaborating are tied to cross-border operations. For instance, if a German foundation wants to fund a Spanish Horizon Europe project, it might not get a tax deduction equivalent to that for funding a German project, due to differences in national tax law. Although the EU's non-discrimination principle (and a 2009 ruling by the Court of Justice of the European Union in *Persche*) established that donations to foreign EU charities should get equal tax treatment, in practice administrative burdens and uncertainty remain.

Foundations also encounter difficulties moving funds or operating programmes in other EU countries due to local registration requirements, banking restrictions, or even differing interpretations of what activities are charitable. This 'friction' reduces foundations' ability or willingness to join EU-wide efforts. The Commission's 2023 proposal explicitly addresses this by urging Member States to facilitate cross-border philanthropy (e.g. standardised certificate for foreign foundations). Until such measures are implemented, however, these frictions continue to act as a barrier.

4.5. Geographical restrictions in foundation mandates

On the foundation side, many have mandates restricting funds to certain geographical areas (often a city, region, or country). For instance, Compagnia di San Paolo is legally bound to fund in Turin/Piedmont and only non-profits. This means that even if CdSP wants to support a Horizon Europe project, it can only do so if the project benefits their locality. In practice, CdSP has worked around this by funding local researchers who have gotten Seals of Excellence. Similarly, some family foundations have charters focusing only on, say, UK science or French education. This limits their ability to contribute to an EU-wide pot where funds could go anywhere. It requires creative solutions, like earmarking their contribution for a specific country's teams in a larger consortium – but that complicates the simplicity of a unified EU project. From the Commission's perspective, such earmarking can conflict with the principle of EU added value (funds not geographically pre-allocated). Thus, geographical constraints can hinder foundations from joining unless mechanisms are designed to accommodate them.

4.6. Concerns about independence and influence

A delicate issue is how to balance the Commission's decision-making independence with the influence of private funders. EU institutions must avoid any perception that policy or funding decisions are 'bought' by wealthy private philanthropies. Foundations themselves guard their independence – they do not want to become merely instruments of government policy or to be seen as substituting for public funding responsibilities. The literature on public–philanthropic partnerships, particularly from the US where they are more common, highlights this tension: governments may lean on foundations to fill budget gaps, leading foundations to worry they are legitimising government retreat (Abramson, Soskis, & Toepler, 2012). Meanwhile, public officials may resent or distrust foundation involvement, fearing a loss of control or accountability.

EU Joint Undertakings under Horizon Europe should in principle be able to cope with this difficulty. On the other hand, foundations usually have their own strategies and priorities. One interviewee, reflecting on the EU's SoE approach – where projects receive a quality endorsement but rely on other funders for financing – emphasised that philanthropy would not be satisfied with just funding projects left unfunded by the EU. Doing so also implies accepting the EU's definition of excellence, which could constrain the foundation's own strategy and priorities. The interviewee noted that upholding an independent and strategic financing approach is crucial to shaping a foundation's identity. Therefore, the EU's research agenda may not align well with the more curiosity-driven, bottom-up strategies typically adopted by foundations.

4.7. Administrative burden and transaction costs

Many foundations have a lean staff and simple grant-making procedures, whereas engaging with the Commission means navigating EU portals, lengthy legal agreements, consortium meetings in Brussels, etc. For a foundation officer used to a quick internal decision process, the administrative load of an EU partnership can be off-putting. Indeed, some smaller foundations reported that the one-time cost of figuring out how to collaborate with the EU was too high. Unless there are clearer templates or support, this barrier persists. It tends to concentrate partnerships in the hands of a few large, well-resourced foundations that can afford the transaction costs, whereas smaller foundations either do not attempt or drop out after initial forays.

One interviewed foundation stressed the importance of shielding researchers from excessive bureaucracy, warning that the heavy administrative demands of working with the EU could undermine its reputation for flexibility among the research community. Another interviewee, however, noted that some of procedures within a foundation could be stricter than in the Commission, and did not view this as an obstacle.

4.8. Cultural differences and mutual awareness

There is also a softer barrier of organisational culture. The Commission (and its Executive Agencies that manage many grants) is a bureaucracy with formal communication channels and hierarchy. Foundations can be more entrepreneurial or informal, with decision-making often centralised in a small leadership (e.g. a foundation's director or a family board might decide on partnerships personally). A mismatch in pace and style can cause frustration. One could say that the Commission speaks the language of policy and procedure, while foundations speak mission and innovation. Still, this difference is likely to gradually wane over the coming years if the next Horizon Europe is to adopt a more dynamic, adaptive and mission-oriented approach. Bridging this gap requires mutual education and finding a 'third way for collaboration' that is neither rigidly bureaucratic nor unstructured. Awareness is also an issue: many foundations simply do not know what opportunities exist to work with the EU, or who to contact. Conversely, Commission officials (outside a few units in DG RTD or DG INTPA) may have limited exposure to foundations beyond the famous few, such that they may not consider philanthropic input. Initiatives like dedicated contact points or forums (discussed later) aim to reduce this information asymmetry.

Structural differences – such as those in objectives, missions, or values – may also influence the interest of foundations in participating in a programme, as one interviewee noted. The impact of funded projects can be another factor, as these should align with the philanthropy's mission, if any. Another interviewee emphasised that formulating a mutual strategy for all foundations is impossible, as it is unrealistic to achieve consensus among them. As a possible suggestion, major leading foundations could act as spokespersons, bringing collective interests to the Commission.

4.9. Accountability and visibility

When a foundation partners on a public initiative, questions arise about accountability for results and visibility of contributions. Foundations rightly desire recognition for their contributions (to justify them to their trustees or donors), but the EU has strict rules on branding and publicity (e.g. an EU-funded project cannot give undue prominence to one partner's logo). There may also be differences in evaluation: the Commission must evaluate programmes against EU objectives and taxpayer value, while foundations might use different metrics (social impact, innovation sparked, etc.). Aligning evaluation frameworks can be challenging, potentially causing a barrier if foundations feel their impact will not be captured or valued appropriately in a joint effort. Yet, this is more of a technical issue that can be worked out given the will to do so; even so, it merits attention in designing future cooperation models. One interviewee, however, emphasised that visibility is unlikely to be a significant obstacle for foundations with strong communication practices, as these activities can be conducted in parallel.

5. KEY LESSONS LEARNED

In sum, the barriers range from concrete legal impediments to softer trust and knowledge gaps. None are insurmountable – indeed, the case studies show workarounds exist – but they require purposeful action to overcome. Addressing these barriers is essential if the Commission–philanthropy relationship is to scale from sporadic successes to a stable, systemic partnership in FP10.

Drawing on the foregoing analysis, several key lessons emerge that should inform the design of FP10 and related EU partnership instruments. These lessons encapsulate what has worked, what has not, and what could be done differently to enhance Commission–foundation collaboration.

- Principle-based collaboration outperforms rigid models. A clear takeaway from Horizon Europe's experiments is that a principles-driven approach – emphasising shared goals, mutual benefit, and voluntary engagement – works better than forcing foundations into one-size-fits-all structures. Whenever the EU tried to simply extend an existing rigid model (like industrial PPP criteria) to foundations, it met limited success. Conversely, flexible arrangements like IHI's contributing partners or the use of MoUs/prizes allowed foundations to engage on their own terms while still contributing to EU objectives. FP10 should therefore seek to institutionalise broad principles for engaging philanthropy (e.g. non-substitution of public funding, respect for foundation autonomy, and openness and transparency in joint actions) and allow multiple pathways for partnership under that umbrella.

- Dedicated interfaces and communication channels are crucial. One of the simplest yet most echoed lessons is the need for an interface between the Commission and the philanthropic sector. Foundations benefited when there were clear contact points – for example, the suggestion (now being partially implemented) of a 'Philanthropy Contact Point' in DG RTD. DG Research's experiment of a liaison based on the UK's industry liaison model underscores that having someone who can guide foundations through the Brussels labyrinth greatly lowers entry barriers. Likewise, annual strategic meetings or fora help align priorities. As later discussed, including philanthropic foundations in future ad hoc councils such as a Council on Research and Innovation for Competitiveness and Security and Council on Global Societal Challenges (see Renda, 2025) would be a powerful way to achieve this result.

- **Success in partnerships requires flexibility and trust**. Case studies like the EDCTP, IHI, and the EU–Gates work show that trust and flexibility are linchpins. Trust is built when both sides follow through on commitments and maintain transparency. For example, EDCTP's trust grew over years as each party saw the other deliver funding when promised. By contrast, attempts to engage philanthropy purely transactionally (e.g. asking a foundation to plug a budget hole without involving them in design) tend not to last.

  Therefore, FP10 should emphasise co-creation, involving foundations early in specifying missions or partnership agendas so they feel ownership, rather than inviting them only at the funding stage. Flexibility manifested in tailoring partnership terms to foundation needs – e.g. allowing a foundation's funds to target a subset of objectives or regions within a larger programme – has often made the difference between yes and no. The Commission has started to show such flexibility (e.g. accepting foundation funds in EFSD with specific earmarks). This lesson should permeate FP10 rules, which should include provisions that enable bespoke contributions (financial or in-kind) from non-traditional partners without forcing uniformity. A concrete idea, as later discussed, would be to incorporate in the FP10 regulation an article on Public-Philanthropic Co-funding that explicitly empowers the Commission to form partnerships with foundations under certain broad conditions (added value, transparency, etc.).

- **Leverage existing mechanisms better for visibility and scaling**. Horizon Europe provided tools like the SoE, contributing partners, etc., but these are not yet widely used or known. A lesson is to amplify and scale what already works. Many foundations were simply unaware that they could fund SoE projects until outreach was done. A recommendation for FP10 is thus to increase the visibility of collaboration schemes, possibly by creating a one-stop 'EU–Philanthropy Collaboration Portal' listing SoE projects seeking funding, upcoming partnership calls open to foundations, and success stories. FP10 could include capacity-building actions to help foundations in Central and Eastern Europe join EU projects, thus spreading the partnership benefits and not concentrating them only in Western or Nordic capitals.

- **Shared goals and complementarity drive success**. Partnerships thrived when there was a clearly identified overlap in Commission and foundation goals, combined with complementary capacities. Attempts at collaboration faltered when goals diverged or when one side's contribution did not complement but rather duplicated the other's. A key lesson here is that cooperation should be designed such that each partner does what it is best at. Foundations can often fund things the EU cannot – e.g. high-risk early research, advocacy, or support for individuals

– while the EU can fund large-scale implementation and infrastructure. Combining these can create a continuum from idea to impact. One concrete outcome of recognising complementarity could be 'sequential funding' models in FP10 where the EU funds a project's core research, and foundations are invited to fund follow-on activities like scaling or policy outreach[17].

- **Global challenges need global partnerships**. A lesson underscored by CEPS and recent dialogues is that for FP10 to tackle global challenges (health, climate and Sustainable Development Goals), it must be outward-looking and embrace international partners, including foundations and other donors. Traditional EU programmes have sometimes struggled to integrate global efforts (CEPI's initial difficulty is one example, where rigid key performance indicators did not fit a global view).

  Learning from that, Dell'Aquila et al. (2025), Renda et al. (2025) and Renda (2025) advocate a more inclusive approach to global R&I cooperation, possibly by creating a dedicated Global Challenges Council or inter-DG taskforce bridging research and international partnerships. The Commission's internal silos (RTD vs INTPA) can hinder partnerships that do not fit neatly as either 'research' or 'development aid', yet foundations often span both (many big foundations fund research for development). For instance, EDCTP's success partly came from bridging the interests of DG RTD and DG DEVCO (INTPA's predecessor).

  A current development is the approach of Global Gateway, which merges hard infrastructure with soft investments (education and research). Foundations, through platforms like the Funders Initiative for Development formed by Philea, are signalling readiness to align with Global Gateway. FP10 and the next Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (an external instrument in Global Europe) should be designed complementarily, so that research partnerships can receive funds from both EU R&I and external cooperation budgets, as well as from foundations.

These lessons depict a path forward where FP10 can be more than just a funding programme; it can act as a catalyst for partnership across public, private, and philanthropic sectors. Incorporating these insights will help avoid past pitfalls and build on proven successes.

[17] The Wellcome example of providing dissemination grants after EU research is a case in point. Institutionalising such sequential funding (with mechanisms to pass the baton from the EU to interested foundations) would ensure good projects do not die at the end of EU funding but can continue to real-world implementation.

6. Policy recommendations and conclusions

Horizon Europe has established more inclusive and structured mechanisms to engage with philanthropic organisations, compared with Horizon 2020. They provide recognition of philanthropic engagement in co-funding mechanisms, greater flexibility for non-financial contributions, and enhanced partnership models. However, to fully reap the benefits of EU–philanthropy cooperation in R&I, a more structured, transparent, and mission-driven approach to EU–philanthropy cooperation should be envisaged under FP10.

At the same time, stronger EU–philanthropy cooperation must not imply a reduction of public funding for research, nor allow private interests to outweigh EU strategic directionality. This principle of additionality should remain explicit in the design of all future cooperation mechanisms. It is particularly important given that only a limited number of European foundations currently operate with an explicit EU-level perspective, with most focusing on either national issues or global agendas.

Recommendation 1: Institutionalise EU–philanthropy collaboration frameworks.

Create a dedicated coordination mechanism to improve strategic priority setting for the Horizon Europe Pillar II, ensuring a structure for the participation of philanthropic actors from the outset. Such a mechanism would ideally be linked to the creation of ad hoc councils such as a Council on Global Societal Challenges and a Council on Research and Innovation for Competitiveness and Security. As explained in Renda (2025), these entities would, if well designed, fill a gap in the European Commission's ability to leverage public and private R&I funding to achieve impact in terms of both competitiveness and security, and on global and societal challenges. Such coordination mechanisms could also increase synergies in the interlinkages between Horizon Europe, the European Competitiveness Fund and Global Europe. They would gather EU institutions and the private sector, alongside large philanthropies with a keen interest in European competitiveness (e.g. European enterprise foundations) or with a global challenges focus.

A complementary initiative could be the creation of a 'European Philanthropy Partnership Platform' under FP10. This would serve as the institutionalised interface connecting foundations with EU policy planning, addressing the current ad hoc nature of engagement. The platform could take the form of a high-level European Commission–Philanthropy Forum convened annually, complemented by a permanent liaison office or Philanthropy Contact Point within the Commission (ideally in DG RTD, with network links to DG INTPA and others). This interface could also enable a regular high-level dialogue between foundation presidents or CEOs, major impact investors, and the responsible Commissioner, ensuring strategic alignment at the leadership level.

Finally, it would be useful to embed philanthropy in mission-oriented governance (through the above-mentioned Councils but also in missions or partnerships) to align foundation contributions with EU strategic priorities. This is going to be needed even more for the proposed moonshots under FP10, which will leverage funding from Horizon Europe and the European Competitiveness Fund, as well as national, public, and private sources.

It is important, however, to note one additional challenge: the limited capacity of many foundations to collaborate effectively among themselves. This further underscores the need for structured EU-level coordination mechanisms.

RECOMMENDATION 2: INTEGRATE AN ARTICLE INTO THE FP10 REGULATION ENABLING PUBLIC–PHILANTHROPIC CO-FUNDING PARTNERSHIPS.

To resolve legal ambiguities, FP10's basic act should explicitly provide a legal basis for partnerships between the Commission and philanthropic foundations, analogous to the provisions for industry and Member State partnerships in previous programmes. The recommendation here is to include a dedicated 'Public–Philanthropic Partnership' article in the FP10 regulation or decision. Such an article would outline criteria and modalities under which foundations could jointly fund and implement FP10 actions with the EU.

For example, it could stipulate that 'the Programme may be implemented through partnerships with philanthropic organisations towards common objectives, where partners jointly design activities and commit resources, in a transparent manner ensuring Union added value and adherence to EU financial rules'. Codifying the relation between the EU and philanthropies in law would significantly boost legal clarity and simplification. This action would overcome the barrier arising from the lack of a specific channel for philanthropic funds into EU projects. Under FP10, a dedicated article could pave the way for establishing, for example, a co-funding scheme where a foundation and the Commission issue a joint call.

RECOMMENDATION 3: FACILITATE JOINT FUNDING AND HYBRID FINANCING MODELS.

When designing joint funding models, it is essential to recognise that the core added value of philanthropy does not primarily lie in its funding volume, but in its capacity to experiment, de-risk, and innovate when assessing and funding approaches. FP10 mechanisms should therefore preserve and leverage this flexibility rather than assimilate foundations into rigid structures. The Commission's traditional partnership approach, where private actors simply co-fund Commission-designed initiatives, has limited the potential for genuinely shared governance and should evolve towards models where philanthropic actors can shape, manage, and co-fund initiatives on equal footing.

Key actions in this respect would include the following:

- **Allow foundations to co-manage EU funds and distribute sub-grants locally** ('cascade funding'). A possible model for involving foundations in the co-management and co-financing of EU funds would involve pooling resources from Horizon Europe and philanthropic organisations (as in the European Social Catalyst Fund). This would allow foundations to finance projects on their territory, through the creation and management of such a fund.
- Create **dedicated co-investment tools within FP10**, drawing inspiration from the ongoing work under InvestEU and the European Social Catalyst Fund, combining resources from Horizon Europe, philanthropy, and private investors.
- Align with the goals of the Social Economy Action Plan to **mobilise private resources for local impact**. The plan envisages dedicated co-investment mechanisms with foundations and philanthropic organisations around target mission areas.
- Introduce **matching-fund schemes and blended finance instruments** enabling philanthropic resources to complement EU and Member State funding.

Recommendation 4: Launch a 'Philanthropy Co-Investment Fund' or Matching Facility as part of FP10.

The Commission could create a financial instrument or dedicated budget line within FP10 that is designed to co-invest alongside philanthropic foundations in R&I actions. One way to do this is to establish a Philanthropy Co-Investment Fund, which would hold a portion of the FP10 budget earmarked to match foundation contributions on a 1:1 (or 2:1, etc.) basis for specific projects or challenge areas. Foundations would apply or sign agreements to put funding into a project, and the EU would match that via this fund, doubling the resources available. This concept leverages the successful experiences of matching schemes seen in national contexts (for example, the UK's Global Challenges Research Fund, see Renda, 2025).

At the EU level, an analogy exists in blended finance under the EIC (mixing grants with private equity). The fund could feature a rolling call for foundations to propose high-impact projects or scale-ups of Horizon-funded research that they are willing to co-fund. Upon evaluation, the EU would match those funds to launch the project. Importantly, such a facility should have a flexible design to accommodate foundation needs: for example, allowing foundation funds to be more flexible (covering costs that EU funds cannot, like certain overheads or follow-up activities), thereby adhering to the principle of complementarity.

In a further step, the Commission could even consider creating a 'Joint Philanthropy Incubator' to support partnerships. This could be set up along the lines of the Foundation for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in the US (see the Appendix), an independent charity supporting the NIH by raising private funds and managing public–private programmes.

Importantly, given the difficulty experienced by philanthropies to adjust to the financial rules, reporting requirements and overall modus operandi of the European Commission and the research agencies, the option to set up dedicated funds, separate from other Horizon Europe instruments and less tied to their current rules was highly favoured by the philanthropies that we interviewed. What emerged is a clear preference for specific mission-oriented initiatives in which the European Commission may take a minority share, and that would be managed by professional, agile and very competent programme managers.

RECOMMENDATION 5: EXPAND AND DEEPEN THE SEAL OF EXCELLENCE MECHANISM FOR PHILANTHROPIC ENGAGEMENT.

Building on the proven utility of the SoE as a bridge between EU evaluation and foundation funding, FP10 should significantly expand its scope and actively facilitate its use by foundations.

- First, FP10 should ensure that all relevant pillars and instruments can award SoEs (not just the MSCA and EIC as is currently the case, but also the ERC, collaborative projects, EU Missions etc., wherever excellent projects go unfunded). This will create a larger pipeline of high-quality projects seeking alternative funding.
- Second, the Commission should set up an SoE Marketplace – a digital platform where SoE-certified project proposals (with consent) are listed and can be searched by potential funders, including foundations, corporations, regional authorities, etc.
- Third, FP10 should consider piloting 'Foundation-endorsed Seals' or an accreditation scheme for foundations. Large foundations with robust review processes (akin to, say, the Wellcome Trust or Volkswagen Stiftung) could be authorised to confer an SoE logo on proposals they have independently evaluated to be of a high standard, which the Commission could in turn recognise. Foundations could also offer 'lighter' application processes for SoE holders. The

expected result of enhancing and expanding the SoE would be a reduction in the waste of excellent ideas and a demonstration of complementarity.

Recommendation 6: Streamline administrative processes and adapt financial rules for foundation partnerships.

The Commission should undertake a review and reform of its administrative procedures to lower transaction costs in general for project selection, monitoring and implementation – particularly for philanthropic collaboration in FP10. This includes simplifying joint funding agreements, providing flexible funding modalities and ensuring that participation from foundations does not trigger disproportionate bureaucracy. The Commission's legal service should clarify that receiving a foundation's contribution for a project does not equate to revenue that needs complex handling, but is rather akin to 'assigned revenue', which EU financial regulations already allow. (The financial regulation has provisions for external assigned revenue, which could be explicitly utilised.)

Importantly, simplification mechanisms should allow for adaptation to the needs of smaller and mid-sized foundations, which currently face disproportionate administrative barriers when interacting with the Commission. Ensuring that the rules and engagement channels remain accessible to these actors is key, as they play an essential role in compensating for uneven R&I investments across European regions.

Another process improvement would be allowing in-kind contributions from foundations to count in partnerships with minimal audit complications. Additional facilitating measures could include waiving certain requirements when foundations join consortia as partners (e.g. in collaborative projects or European Research Area Networks). FP10 grant agreement templates could have a special clause or annex for 'Participating Foundations' that would set out simplified obligations. And an FP10 Philanthropy Collaboration Handbook could be developed as a guidance document for both Commission staff and foundations, laying out processes, legal FAQs, model agreements, and good practices. It would be useful if such guidance could illustrate concrete collaboration steps along the entire grant-making cycle – such as due diligence, project selection, monitoring, data sharing and follow-up actions – to make partnerships more operational and predictable.

The Commission could further explore expanding the use of fiscal regimes. Learning for example from the US context, this approach could facilitate the channelling of philanthropic resources into EU-funded or EU-aligned activities, reducing administrative friction for both sides.

On the financial rules side, beyond the FP10 regulation, the overarching EU Financial Regulation could be revised (when next updated) to explicitly allow trust funds or blending facilities to receive private contributions without cumbersome approvals. With the EFSD, this was made possible through an ad hoc Council decision. Generalising this approach would expedite future partnerships.

Finally, in the case of co-funding, FP10 should strive for joint evaluation frameworks where a single reporting process satisfies both EU and foundation accountability needs. This would not only reduce burdens but also foster a shared learning culture.

RECOMMENDATION 7: ALIGN HORIZON EUROPE AND GLOBAL EUROPE FOR JOINT ACTION ON TACKLING GLOBAL CHALLENGES.

FP10 should ensure strong synchronisation between Horizon Europe and Global Europe, linking research to innovation and its deployment and diffusion, and enhancing the Research, Education and Innovation pillar under the Global Gateway. This would encourage multi-stakeholder R&I partnerships that link EU research capacity with global development and sustainability objectives, leveraging philanthropy's ability to fund high-risk or early-stage innovation.

Another important action would be to include philanthropic actors from the start in decisions over resource allocation and prioritisation, as well as in the design of R&I partnerships. This would enable foundations to contribute expertise, funding, and de-risking mechanisms to EU-led investments and promote collaboration on multistakeholder partnerships for global R&I. Such action is of course highly complementary with the recommendations above, especially 1 and 4.

Moreover, it would help to institutionalise joint programming and co-creation mechanisms, involving foundations in dialogue with, for example, DG RTD, DG INTPA, DG ECHO, DG MENA, and DG ENSET, for coherent engagement with philanthropic initiatives under Global Gateway. Notably, not all philanthropic actors may seek closer alignment with EU priorities; any new mechanism should therefore remain voluntary and offer clear benefits for participation. In designing cooperation mechanisms, the EU could draw lessons from successful interfaces between national governments and domestic philanthropic actors in Member States (e.g. "la Caixa" in Spain), where structured dialogue and clear incentives have strengthened cooperation.

In addition, given the ongoing retrenchment of official development assistance, including in Europe, rethinking EU–philanthropy cooperation requires a wider global lens. This includes stronger engagement with Asian philanthropic actors who are becoming increasingly influential in global development and innovation ecosystems.

Finally, the Commission could support dialogue and matchmaking activities between philanthropic organisations, the EU, and Member States to scale up participation and alignment of objectives. This should build on convergent missions of the EU and philanthropies, particularly in areas such as global health, climate resilience, food security, and digital inclusion, in order to plan joint R&I partnerships. As highlighted in a recent CEPS report, key areas in which the EU and philanthropies could launch collaborative R&I initiatives that are mission-oriented and global include mental health, women's health, the digital public infrastructure, climate and biodiversity, as well as artificial intelligence (Renda et al., 2025).

Appendix. The US experience: a federal ecosystem of intermediary foundations as 'single-door' interfaces for public–philanthropic collaboration

The US has developed a dense ecosystem of legally mandated, arm's-length foundations that enable public agencies to collaborate with private philanthropy on R&I. For FP10, this US case study is highly relevant because it showcases how intermediary foundations and clear gift-acceptance rules can give philanthropies a reusable, accountable 'door' into public programmes, while keeping final authority in public hands.

This appendix case study complements Section 2.3 on mechanisms and collaboration models under Horizon Europe (co-funded European Partnerships and 'contributing partner' arrangements in initiatives such as IHI, EDCTP, and SoE). It sheds light on US examples of structurally similar – but often more formalised – 'single-door' foundations.

For US R&I partnerships, several federal health agencies work through congressionally authorised non-profit foundations – such as the Foundation for the NIH (FNIH), the CDC Foundation (for Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), and the Reagan-Udall Foundation for the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). These organisations can receive private contributions for agency-aligned research and regulatory-science efforts. The FNIH is a 501(c)(3) charitable organisation established by statute in 1990 to raise private funding and manage public–private partnerships that support NIH's mission. The CDC Foundation is an independent 501(c)(3) public charity and the sole entity authorised by Congress to raise private funds for the CDC, giving CDC access to flexible philanthropic and corporate resources under public-law oversight. The Reagan-Udall Foundation for the FDA is an independent non-profit created by Congress in 2007 to advance the US FDA's mission, with bylaws that specify gift-acceptance and conflict-of-interest provisions.

These statutory mandates are functionally analogous to the dedicated legal basis for Public–Philanthropic Co-Funding Partnerships proposed in Recommendation 2 of the main report, which would explicitly empower the European Commission to form structured partnerships with philanthropic organisations under FP10.

In practice, these foundations pool philanthropic and corporate funds into multi-party programmes that complement rather than displace agency priorities. For example, the FNIH Biomarkers Consortium convenes industry, academia, and regulators in precompetitive projects that develop and qualify biomarkers, with results made publicly available to support regulatory decision-making (Menetski et al., 2019). The CDC Foundation projects must align with the CDC's strategic priorities and follow the CDC's internal gift-management rules, which allow the CDC to reassess or halt externally funded projects if concerns arise. Similarly, the Reagan-Udall Foundation supports FDA priority areas such as regulatory science fellowships under formal MoUs, while the FDA maintains its own guidance on evaluating and accepting gifts. These kinds of multi-year, co-designed consortia resemble what the main report describes in Recommendation 4 as a Philanthropy Co-Investment Fund and Joint Philanthropy Incubator. These US examples, thus, provide direct design references for FP10 proposals.

Conceptually, this architecture functions as a single-door interface: an authorised gateway that standardises due diligence and gift acceptance, so partners do not renegotiate basic terms on every project, lowering transaction costs while preserving public-law safeguards. This approach lowers transaction costs and provides a predictable governance environment without requiring foundations to negotiate bespoke arrangements with each programme or centre.

Governance research on Offices of Strategic Partnerships (OSPs) in the US reaches similar conclusions: OSPs and liaison offices provide a clear point of entry, broker relationships rather than implement projects, and rely on trust, role clarity, and continuity across administrations (Ferris & Williams, 2014; Toepler, 2018). At the state level, the Governor's Office of Foundation Liaison in Michigan illustrates this model in domestic policy, acting as a cabinet-level broker between foundations and government to co-fund initiatives while leaving agenda setting with elected officials (Ferris & Williams, 2014).

These single points of entry highlight the value of this report's call for dedicated interfaces and communication channels in Section 5 on key lessons learned – for instance, a 'Philanthropy Contact Point' in DG RTD (now being partially implemented). Additionally, the US experience underscores that such offices should focus on brokering and coordination rather than on project implementation.

US tax design helps explain why this architecture can quickly mobilise large philanthropic contributions. Charitable organisations recognised under section 501(c)(3) are exempt from federal income tax, and donors can deduct contributions from taxable income. A large body of empirical literature shows that private giving is highly sensitive to the tax price of giving: for instance, Duquette (2016) finds that a 1% increase in the tax cost of giving leads to roughly a 4% decline in charities' donation revenue, using panel data from IRS filings (see Auten et al., 2002). These findings imply that US tax rules effectively subsidise donors' priority-setting at scale and help explain why US agencies can unlock large, multi-year co-funding quickly.

For FP10, the lesson is not to emulate US policy on tax – which remains largely outside EU competence – but to assume that philanthropic capital is shaped by national tax regimes. The EU should design FP10's mechanisms so that willing donors have legitimate and easy channels to co-fund EU-level programmes. These insights underline Recommendation 6, which calls for clearer treatment of in-kind contributions, trust funds, and blending facilities as ways to accommodate different funding modalities while keeping public objectives and safeguards intact.

At the same time, democratic critiques in the US highlight risks that EU designers will want to anticipate. Charitable tax deductions and exemptions represent tens of billions of dollars yearly in forgone federal revenue; US estimates put tax subsidies for charities at around USD 50 billion in 2016–2019, raising concerns that philanthropy can operate as a form of privately controlled public spending (Reich, 2018). Critics such as Rob Reich and others (e.g. Neri-Castracane & Ugazio, 2025; Giridharadas, 2019) warn that large-scale philanthropy may displace or redirect public priorities, especially when decisions are concentrated among wealthy donors and boards rather than democratic processes. Sector-specific watchdogs point to potential agenda distortion and perceived or real conflicts of interest when external funders support programmes in regulatory science or public health.

These concerns do not rule out collaboration, but they sharpen the design tests: transparency about who funds what, clear allocation of decision rights, and safeguards ensuring that core scientific and regulatory authority remains public. They mirror the main report's emphasis on transparency in Section 5 on key lessons for building trust and its call for robust conflict-of-interest rules and public leadership in agenda setting, including in the use of trust funds and blending facilities (Recommendation 6).

Taken together, the US public–philanthropic landscape offers three main design lessons for FP10:

(1) **Create reusable single-door interfaces**. Intermediary foundations and liaison offices that sit at arm's length from government allow philanthropies to plug into public programmes through standard rules and governance structures. For FP10, this points towards a 'European Philanthropy Partnership Platform', a 'Philanthropy Contact Point' / collaboration portal in DG RTD (Recommendation 1), and an explicit 'Public–Philanthropic Partnership' article in the FP10 regulation (Recommendation 2) that establish entry points, roles, and conditions for co-funding. These arrangements would resemble Horizon Europe's existing co-funded partnerships and 'contributing partner' models but go structurally further by giving philanthropy a more stable and reusable institutional home.

(2) **Use matching and co-investment mechanisms, not just ad hoc gifts**. US foundations often participate in multi-year, co-designed programmes where agency priorities are set publicly and philanthropic money complements rather than substitutes government funding. This is analogous to the main report's

proposals in Recommendation 4 for a 'Philanthropy Co-Investment Fund', matching schemes, and a 'Joint Philanthropy Incubator' like the NIH Foundation. Such mechanisms can also be designed to accommodate in-kind and data contributions, and to work through trust funds or blending facilities as envisaged in Recommendation 6, so that philanthropic resources can align with FP10 instruments without losing their flexibility.

(3) **Build in democratic safeguards from the start**. US debates show that large philanthropic influence can trigger legitimacy concerns when it is opaque or unconstrained. FP10 can pre-empt similar critiques by requiring publication of conflicts of interest, embedding open-science and access conditions in co-funded actions, and ensuring that philanthropies participate as complementors under public leadership, not as de facto conveners of EU research agendas. These lessons reinforce the transparency safeguards discussed in Section 5 on lessons learned.

In short, the US ecosystem offers transferable elements for FP10 in the architecture of intermediary foundations and liaison structures that make philanthropic co-funding administratively simple, transparent, and politically defensible at scale. These lessons can be adapted to strengthen the Horizon Europe-style mechanisms, legal bases, and contact points proposed in the main report.

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