

PHILANTHROPIC POWERHOUSE PAUL BREST VISITS AUSTRALIA



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As part of Perpetual's partnership with the Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society (Stanford PACS), we are hosting a series of events with its Co-Director, Paul Brest. He is one of the most important voices for philanthropy in our generation.

Caitriona Fay, Perpetual's General Manager for Community & Social Investment, sees Brest's visit as a significant opportunity for Australia's philanthropic community:

"Paul is the person who's really driven thinking around strategic philanthropy. He says strategic giving isn't just for big foundations, it can be for every person who thinks the role of philanthropy is to create positive change for community. He takes some of that thinking done by bigger foundation and enables families and unstaffed foundations to think with the same kind of rigour and do it really easily."

A true original

While philanthropy is the focus of Brest's visit to Australia, it is by no means the only string to his bow. He studied liberal arts at university and plays the viola and was, in fact, considering a music career before a college professor suggested he try something he 'could be competent at'.

This led to him studying law at Harvard Law School and working as a clerk in the US court system before starting at Stanford Law

School in 1969. At Stanford he quickly earned a reputation as an innovative and original scholar – especially in the area of US Constitutional Law, where there are significant differences of opinion. The debate over how to interpret the US Constitution continues to this day and Brest’s contributions remain influential – in fact he is one of the 50 most cited legal scholars of all time¹.

It’s not easy being Dean

Brest was appointed Dean of Stanford Law School in 1987 and during his 12-year tenure (1987-1999) the School faced many challenges. Chief among these was money.

At the time, Stanford Law School was underfunded, leading to staff salaries around 30 per cent lower than its peers². At the same time, living costs were rising in the Bay Area as the Silicon Valley boom continued. As a legal scholar and academic, fundraising was not a key strength of his, yet he realised its importance and so threw himself wholeheartedly into it. He hired experienced fundraiser Susan Bell and with her help achieved more than double the original funding goal of US\$50 million³.

A pivot to philanthropy

Brest’s love of the viola was an unlikely bridge to the world of philanthropy. He was playing in a chamber group at the time which included Walter Hewlett and Condoleezza Rice, who were also both on the board of the [William and Flora Hewlett Foundation](#). He was offered the role of foundation President and during the 12 years he led the Foundation it grew to more than 100 staff, managing US\$7 billion in endowments.

Caitriona Fay explains:

“The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation is a really significant foundation globally. Paul was greatly influential in setting the standard for how a professional foundation needs to act and should act. Paul’s leadership established the Foundation as a leader in practice and approach to philanthropy, and greatly influenced the sector globally.”

To help The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation maximise the impact of its increased endowment, Brest put a much greater focus on management and in particular on the results of its work. He called this approach ‘strategic philanthropy’ or ‘[outcome-focused philanthropy](#)’. At its core is the idea that organisations should be very clear on their goals and how they plan to achieve them and, critically, how they will measure whether progress is achieved.

While this type of thinking might have been common in business at the time, it was not common among philanthropists and had not been properly adapted to their needs. Brest rigorously implemented this new approach, making sure the Foundation measured the success of **all** its programs. Brest said: “We were good at learning from successes, but we hadn’t developed a system of learning from failures⁴.”

After eight years at Hewlett, Brest shared the lessons he learned in a book called: “*Money Well Spent: A Strategic Plan for Smart Philanthropy*”, which he co-wrote with Hal Harvey. The book became a must-have guide for many philanthropists. Brest and Harvey published the second edition in 2018 where they have incorporated their experiences of the last decade while also taking on board feedback and criticism from others in the philanthropic world.

Leaving a strong Foundation

Brest left The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation in 2011 but has continued his engagement with philanthropy while throwing himself back into academia. Along with his responsibilities as Co-Director of Stanford PACS, Brest is also Professor Emeritus (active), at Stanford Law School and leads Stanford courses on philanthropy, decision-making, and impact investing. He also teaches a free online course, [Essentials of Nonprofit Strategy](#), offered by Philanthropy University.

Caitriona Fay is looking forward to the upcoming visit and the opportunity it provides for philanthropy in Australia:

“Perpetual strongly believes that sharing knowledge is a vital component of great philanthropy. We need to listen to the voices of communities and of peers across the for-purpose sector here and globally. By bringing the experience and wisdom of someone like Paul Brest to Australia, we hope we contribute to this culture of learning and the practice of better philanthropy.”

Stanford PACS in Australia

At Perpetual we are proud to be bringing Paul Brest and other philanthropic experts from Stanford PACS here to Australia. We see it as part of our role to help build expertise in Australia’s philanthropic community, to assist Perpetual clients and other philanthropists to maximise the impact of their contributions.

If you are a NFP, Foundation or philanthropist and would like to enhance your knowledge about strategic philanthropy, please talk to your Perpetual Adviser or contact our Philanthropy team on 1800 501 227 or email us at philanthropy@perpetual.com.au

1. Shapiro, F. (January 2000). "The Most-Cited Legal Scholars". *The Journal of Legal Studies*. The University of Chicago Press, Vol. 29, pp 409–426
2. Driscoll, S. "Paul Brest", *Stanford Lawyer*, May 28, 2014. <https://law.stanford.edu/stanford-lawyer/articles/paul-brest>
3. Ibid.
4. Brest, Paul., 27 Nov, 2013, '[Bridgespan Group website](#)',