

# THE CHRONICLE

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## Fund Raising

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### **Mixed Signals on Giving: While Colleges Seek Flexibility, Donors Follow Their Passion**

*By Kathryn Masterson*

New York

Donors nowadays want to give to programs that they have a passion for and that they believe will make a significant contribution to solving the world's thorniest problems, a major philanthropist told a group of higher-education fund raisers here on Tuesday.

While that trend is generally considered good, it may pose additional challenges and costs to colleges that accept those kinds of donations. Lawrence S. Bacow, president of Tufts University, who spoke here this week at the Council for Advancement and Support of Education's conference, said colleges that relied on endowment gifts to start new programs dug themselves into a financial hole because such programs require additional resources to operate, especially when endowment values drop.

Institutions need more flexibility, not less, in how they spend their money, Mr. Bacow asserted.

The challenge will be for colleges to change the conversation from "what donors want to do" to "how they can help institutions meet their goals". His ideal question to donors: "How can you help us encourage innovation and foster strong leadership?"

"We need to invite our donors to help us solve our problems," Mr. Bacow said.

It may not be the easiest sell.

Charles Bronfman, founder and chairman of the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies, which gave a major gift to McGill University to establish the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada, said on Tuesday that donors no longer wanted to contribute to an umbrella organization—they give where their passions lie.

"That's where it gets really exciting," he said during a panel discussion with Jonathan Tisch, a trustee and major donor at Tufts.

For Mr. Bronfman, the joy of giving comes from understanding what issues move him personally.

If an institution doesn't believe a gift fits its mission, he said, it's the college's responsibility to try to find a better solution. "Work with the donor," Mr. Bronfman said. And if that doesn't change the donor's mind, a college should be disciplined and say thank you, but no.

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