

FAMILY WEALTHREPORT

Philanthropy Firm Benefunder On Its New Clean Energy Impact Fund

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Benefunder said it plans to spark a passionate appeal to donors, including wealthy individuals, who want to be involved in helping solve some of the biggest energy issues facing the US.

[Benefunder](#), the innovation-oriented philanthropy organization, is pushing forward a “green research and commercialization movement” with the launch of a Clean Energy Impact Fund.

The fund will provide crucial resources such as technology to clean energy researchers in the US from top institutions including Harvard, Duke, the University of California, San Diego, Cornell, The University of Texas at Austin, Rice, and Georgia Tech.

Funds will be distributed to the researchers on a quarterly basis, and while donors can make contributions of any size, the firm told *Family Wealth Report* that it is actively reaching out to wealthy individuals and families via family offices, advisors and private foundations. The Clean Energy Impact Fund complements the firm's Charitable Innovation Fund, which is geared specifically toward high net worth donors.

“We need donors and grant makers to engage in innovative ways, such as funding breakthrough discoveries happening in our nation’s academic labs,” said Christian Braemer, co-founder and chief executive at Benefunder, which is based in San Diego.

“The mutual fund concept is centered around major social issues such as clean energy/climate change,” Braemer told *Family Wealth Report*. “These types of funds include compilations of the best and brightest researchers in those fields working on everything from policy to major breakthrough science to commercialization.”

Opportunities for funding these initiatives will include impact investments in “promising commercialized technologies” that might be deemed too risky or early for more traditional funding, the organization said. One such example is safe, cost-effective storage for intermittent solar and wind-generated electricity, which is being developed by Michael Aziz, an engineer at Harvard University.

“Finding the energy to power human civilization without unacceptable damage to the environment is the greatest challenge facing humanity this century. Universities need to research and develop thousands of innovative ideas if scores of them are to successfully grow to help meet this challenge,” Aziz said. “With government research proposal funding rates sinking toward 10 per cent or lower, many of us researchers spend more time writing proposals than innovating in the lab.”

Braemer added that the Clean Energy Impact Fund is particularly appropriate for wealthy families because: it offers unprecedented access and deal flow; is a low-risk alternative to private foundations and public charities; assets are managed by existing wealth advisory teams; and it is discreet, yet donors can be as “hands-on” as they like.

"We see ourselves as a philanthropic marketplace for innovation where a new class of risk capital is created to fund breakthroughs in health, tech, environment, and the arts and humanities," Braemer told *Family Wealth Report*. "We believe this is an important, often overlooked area of wealth management - and a great way to introduce a product to address what families might be most passionate about."

The Clean Energy Impact Fund is the first of several funds that will eventually include cause areas such as veterans, pediatrics, aging, "wearable health," and various disease areas, he said.

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