



KIMBERLY DAVIS

President, JPMorgan Chase Foundation

34

“AS A FIRM, WE’RE IN THE BUSINESS OF MANAGING RISK,” DAVIS SAYS. “PHILANTHROPY IS WHERE WE SHOULD BE TAKING RISKS.”



WHEN KIMBERLY Davis flew from New York to San Diego to announce the \$1 million recipient of JPMorgan Chase’s crowdsourced philanthropy competition, the winners waiting for her on the other end weren’t expecting much—a buttoned-up figurehead, maybe, who would breeze in for 20 minutes, shaking hands and kissing babies for the cameras. “But she showed up at 6 a.m. and talked to every single volunteer about what they did at the organization,” says Laren Poole, cofounder of Invisible Children. “It was so clear that she’s the heartbeat behind the whole thing. She got it in a way that I didn’t expect.”

“It,” of course, is how to connect corporate philanthropy efforts with a young generation more passionate about

grassroots activism—and Facebook slacktivism—than wearing awareness ribbons from faceless foundations. Davis, 50, who has a 17-year-old son and 23-year-old daughter, recognizes that aging donors, rising volunteerism, and social media are fundamentally shifting philanthropy. “Others have stepped into the crowdsource space,” says Davis, “but they’ve done it very gingerly. They’ve put one toe in the water. We put our whole foot and our leg.” With Chase Community Giving last year, she developed a philanthropic effort hosted entirely on Facebook that was astounding for the size of its applicant pool (500,000 charities), the generosity of the purse (\$5 million, including the top prize of \$1 million), and its consumer reach (2.5 million participants). Target, by contrast, allowed voters to choose among just 10 charities, while Pepsi’s Refresh Project, which is awarding grants of up to \$250,000, approves proposals before putting them up for public vote.

Chase Community Giving let Facebookers decide where the funds should flow. Voters chose the 100 \$25,000 finalists

and later reviewed detailed not-for-profit proposals to crown a \$1 million winner: Invisible Children, founded by three young San Diego filmmakers. With an operating budget of just \$7 million annually, it is focused on helping the children of war-torn northern Uganda, including putting 116 girls through college.

To Davis, who has worked in finance for 29 years and started a leadership center for women of color at Spelman College, the project—and the rest of Chase’s philanthropy—isn’t purely altruistic. When Davis became president of the JPMorgan Chase Foundation in 2006, she wanted to cultivate a “futurist view” of philanthropy. She shifted the foundation’s portfolio from broad causes to more strategic donations around education and community development, which she hopes will eventually feed the financial business. (Chase Community

Giving certainly generated plenty of brand awareness among all those Facebook voters.)

“As a firm, we’re in the business of managing risk,” she says. “Philanthropy is where we should be taking risks, but there were a lot of questions about the level of transparency needed to run this in an authentic way.” Raising the blinds on the entire crowdsourcing process made a few bankers nervous, and it also raised issues: Some participants cried foul over fishy Facebook votes with profile names like “Gdfg Kcjbvkljvb.” And when Chase hid the (belatedly added) leaderboard a few days before the contest closed—to build excitement, it said—some pro-life and marijuana-advocacy groups complained that they were being secretly ushered off the list. “It’s like *Survivor*,” Poole says. “That first season was shocking—what it took to win and the level of scheming and alliances. Chase is hanging a steak in front of a pack of hungry dogs, even if it’s for noble causes.”

Davis insists that, like all pioneers, she and her colleagues learned from their first foray: When the second iteration of Community Giving launches this summer, there will be a leaderboard posted from the beginning until the end. “This trend in philanthropy,” she says, “is only going to accelerate.”

—Kate Rockwood