

Skoll Foundation Leverages Technology to Inspire Grassroots 'Giving Circles' with a Global Focus

As grassroots “giving circles” take hold across the country, the Skoll Foundation has launched a campaign that merges the impact of television with the reach of the Internet to inspire charitable giving internationally.

The Skoll Foundation’s new initiative is designed to use the power of media to interest Americans in helping to solve social and economic problems far from home. Following a \$1.7 million investment in *The New Heroes*, which will premiere June 28, the foundation created a DVD with four compelling documentary stories excerpted from the 12-story television series. The foundation is giving the free DVDs to individuals who host informal gatherings and grassroots giving circles across the country.

Founded by eBay’s first president, Jeff Skoll, the Skoll Foundation recognizes that technology can be harnessed in new ways to establish a direct connection between Americans who want to help and social entrepreneurs with worthy projects that merit their support, but might be on the other side of the world.

“Book clubs focus on a book. Why not create a DVD to stimulate informal giving circles?” asks Sandy Herz, VP of Marketing and Communications at the Skoll Foundation. “Great documentary storytelling is so powerful, it is the ideal catalyst to move people to action. It is a new medium to spark grassroots philanthropy.”

The DVD is available for free online at www.thenewheroes.org. After watching the DVD, viewers can return to the same Web site to make a direct donation to any of the projects through a secure online site run by GlobalGiving. The Skoll Foundation will match up to \$100,000 in donations to New Heroes projects listed on the site through August 31.

Breaking the stereotype of a philanthropist as a Rockefeller or a Gates, millions of Americans are joining together to form giving circles. It was reported recently* that \$44 million has been contributed by giving circles since 2000. Most of this charity has been directed at local problems with which the donors are familiar. Figuring out how to have an impact on problems such as poverty, ignorance, violence and disease around the globe is much more challenging.

The Skoll Foundation anticipates its “New Heroes House Party” campaign will generate new giving circles of friends and neighbors with a global focus. It also wants to inspire existing giving circles to think on an international scale—not just after a major catastrophe such as the tsunami, but on an ongoing basis.

“While the news media is invaluable in times of crisis, in general it gives less coverage to systemic global problems. By providing this high-impact video to giving circles on DVD and opening up a channel on the Internet for contributions, we hope to provide a new and more consistent avenue for the amazing global goodwill that we have seen ordinary Americans express time and again,” says Herz.

About the Skoll Foundation

Headquartered in Palo Alto, Calif., the Skoll Foundation was created in 1999 by Jeff Skoll, the founding president of eBay. Its mission is to advance systemic change benefiting communities around the world by investing in, connecting and celebrating social entrepreneurs, who are individuals dedicated to pioneering new solutions that result in lasting improvements to complex social problems.

The Skoll Foundation invests in social entrepreneurs through three award programs. The foundation connects social entrepreneurs through its online community, Social Edge at www.socialedge.org and via the annual Skoll World Forum on Social Entrepreneurship at the Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship at Oxford University. It celebrates social entrepreneurs through projects such as a four-part public television documentary called "The New Heroes" that will be broadcast in 2005. For more information, visit www.skollfoundation.org.

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*The research cited about the national trend in giving circles is available at <http://www.givingforum.org/givingcircles/downloads/Long%20report.pdf>