

Umbrella foundations and endowment funds

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Creating a foundation requires capital, governance and administration that not every philanthropist wishes to take on. Umbrella foundations meet this need: under their own legal personality, they host named funds dedicated by donors to specified purposes, and they handle their management, compliance and distribution in return for moderate fees.¹ Geneva has several of them, created by banks, families or associations, which together manage hundreds of hosted funds. This form allows donors with a few hundred thousand francs to gain access to structured philanthropy, and allows banks to offer their clients a service integrated into wealth management.

University and institutional endowment funds form another category. The University of Geneva, the universities of applied sciences, the hospitals and the cultural institutions of Geneva have foundations that receive gifts and manage capital whose income finances research, scholarships and projects. Geneva managers administer part of these assets, under investment policies that increasingly integrate sustainability criteria.² These funds are modest compared with the endowments of American universities, but they are growing, and the financial centre has an interest in their development: a well-endowed university trains the professionals the centre needs.

1 Notes

1. Swiss Philanthropy Foundation (swissphilanthropy.ch): independent umbrella foundation, recognised as serving the public interest, created in Geneva in 2006, which hosts philanthropic funds under its own structure. ↩

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2. Fondation pour l'Université de Genève (FUNIGE, funige.ch): foundation created in 2025 with the support of the Fondation Hans Wilsdorf to finance research, teaching and services to the community beyond the ordinary budget, chaired by the Rector, Audrey Leuba; Fonds général de l'Université de Genève (fgug.ch): private-law foundation that places at the University's disposal the resources derived from the management of gifts, legacies and grants. ↩

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