From personal giving to strategic philanthropy

When Walter J. Baer (1895–1970) founded the Julius Baer Foundation in 1965, marking the Bank's 75th anniversary, his intentions were both simple and profound: to share the bank's success with society. Culture, arts, and science lay at the heart of the family's commitment to society, shaping their early philanthropic engagement. Over the decades, their charitable giving has evolved into a strategic philanthropic endeavour, guided by a deep sense of responsibility and commitment. Today, the Foundation strategically focuses its efforts on reducing wealth inequality, enhancing its impact worldwide.

Sixty years ago, the Julius Baer Foundation became one of the first charitable organisation associated with a Swiss bank. While Julius Baer (1857–1922), the Bank's founder, regularly supported charitable causes, it was his son Walter who institutionalised the family's commitment to share their success with the public. In the initial decades, the Foundation focused on three principal domains: science, art, and culture within Switzerland. Among its notable endeavours, the Foundation funded libraries, facilitated art therapy studios and sessions for young people*, provided academic scholarships, awarded research projects, and procured instruments for gifted musicians.

Youth remained a key focus when the foundation further supported Caritas in crime prevention in the early 2000s. Other major contributions went to the Gustav Mahler youth orchestra, the Tonhalle Zurich, and the Museum of Communication in Bern, among others, while smaller grants backed many additional projects.

As the Baer family's ownership of the group evolved, the Foundation's governance transitioned as well. Family members on the foundation board stepped down in 2006, passing leadership to senior employees of the Bank while retaining one family representative. Later, external subject matter experts also joined the Board.

As the Bank expanded globally, the Foundation professionalised its grant-making and extended its global reach. By 2017, reducing wealth inequality had emerged as one of three focus areas, evolving to become its sole focus by 2023. Today, the Foundation takes a leading role in raising awareness, fostering collaboration, and driving meaningful action across the wealth spectrum to create equal opportunities in the most unequal countries of the world.

"Looking back over the last 60 years of the Foundation, I'm most proud that it evolved over the decades and the chapters of the Bank's evolution, and that the various generations of managers and employees actually found their cause and live it with passion. That's the best thing you can have, because if it's just a job, it's not alive. This foundation is alive and ready for the future."

Raymond J. Baer
Honorary chairman Julius Baer Group

* this engagement has been privately supported from the outset by Monika and the late Dr. Thomas J. Bär.



1965
Founding of the Julius Baer Foundation by Walter J. Baer (1895–1970)



UNTIL 2006
Family-led foundation, active mainly in Switzerland, focusing on youth and supporting science, young artists, students, and culture.

2006
Integration of two foundations resulting from the acquisition of the private banks Ehinger & Armand von Ernst AG and Ferrier Lullin & Cie Sa into the existing Julius Baer Foundation



2007
The Foundation Board changes from family-led to a board comprising senior/leading members of the Bank and one family representative.

2008
The Foundation starts supporting more projects outside of Switzerland.



2017



- Wealth Inequality becomes one of three core areas of the Julius Baer Foundation.
- The Foundation shifts from traditional giving to strategic philanthropy. The Bank amplifies impact by matching donations and connecting the Foundation with clients and philanthropists. Employee involvement rises.

2019
The 'Julius Bär Stiftung Deutschland' is founded in Germany.



2021
Launch of the digital platform Wealth Inequality Initiative
wealth-inequality.net

2023
The Foundation focuses entirely on reducing wealth inequality, leveraging its role as a convener at the nexus of the Bank's network and the broader philanthropic sector.

2024



- Launch of Julius Baer Foundation UK, a Collective Fund allowing clients and employees in the UK to contribute; direct donation options in Brazil, India, Spain, and Asia strengthen the Foundation's global engagement.
- Today, the Foundation supports various projects in the most unequal countries in the world and actively fosters collaboration across the wealth divide to create equal opportunities for all.