The schism between rich and poor, the haves and have-nots, that has so galvanized the Occupy movement is boldly present, and problematic, in the nonprofit sector.

On the one hand, deep-pocketed nonprofits with even deeper-pocketed supporters have seen tremendous fundraising success and are upping capital campaign goals. Stanford received one of its largest donations ever in 2011; SFMOMA has determined it can raise $75 million more in capital and endowment funds than it thought it could raise one year ago. A large construction project and capital campaign is also under way at the Exploratorium.

Large foundations have continued to see healthy endowment growth since 2008, and nonprofits large and small have held record fundraising galas and events — so long as they are friends with the right people.

At the other end of the spectrum, many nonprofits are at the end of the line.

The San Francisco Foundation and the James Irvine Foundation both continue to help nonprofits figure out how to merge or go out of business with dignity, recognizing that for many, staying open no longer makes financial sense.

According to the Nonprofit Research Collaborative, almost 60 percent of surveyed nonprofits saw giving decline or stay flat in the first nine months of 2011 compared to 2010. The same study found that 65
percent of donors do not plan to increase their giving in 2012. That bodes ill for 2012.

Consider, too, the sorry state of state and city budgets. That has a direct impact on many nonprofit budgets, forcing many to scale back services and even lay off employees, both of which ripple through the economy and the sector. A study by Changing Our World, a philanthropy consulting firm, said that state budget losses will continue to impact the nonprofits that rely on government funds at least through 2013.

And the needle on need is not going in the right direction. The economy remains unpredictable at best, and those at the margins are seeing their need increase, not decrease. The safety net was threadbare a year ago, and it is only getting thinner.

People to watch: The New Tech Millionaires

The Bay Area is home to LinkedIn, Zynga, Facebook, Google. There are also Twitter and Yelp and up-and-comers like Square. Each of these companies in turn has spawned or will spawn a cadre of the newly rich. Not kind of rich, but very rich. And thanks to the very public moves by some rich people with names like Gates, Buffett, Dell and Benioff, a lot of these new multi-millionaires are thinking philanthropically from the get-go.

“This is something that can pay dividends to our community and the world for literally decades,” said Emmett Carson, CEO of the Silicon Valley Community Foundation.

New funds opened by these newly rich tech titans have helped spur the foundation to dizzying growth. From Dec. 6, 2010, to Dec. 6, 2011, Silicon Valley Community Foundation has raised almost 270 percent more from community members: $367.9 million over the past 12 months compared to $99.1 million for the previous 12 months.

Many people opening donor-advised funds are new to big-time philanthropy, and most still have day jobs, so figuring out their philanthropy is not yet a top priority. But it will be, and Bay Area nonprofits are taking note.

“Many of these new donors are just starting their philanthropic journey, so they are still sorting through what motivates them. ... It takes time to develop what (your philanthropic) interests are,” Carson said. “So while we have the good news that there will be significant new philanthropic resources to aid causes both here and abroad in the future, those resources are not fully online and focused yet.”

Companies to watch: B Corporations

In January, a new kind of corporate structure becomes legal in California: the benefit corporation. This allows for-profit companies to consider a social mission rather than just shareholder returns. As more and more states pass such legislation, benefit corps could prove to be an interesting complement to traditional nonprofits. They can tap new funding sources, and the two structures working side-by-side might prove even more effective at solving large social problems like access to clean water, job training and economic development.

Key 2011 events

1. SFMOMA unveiled the design for Snøhetta’s 235,000-square-foot addition to the existing Mario Botta museum and announced it is now raising $555 million, not the previously-planned $480 million. Some $230 million of that will be for endowment. The museum has also been pledged more than 200 new works as part of a collection campaign.
2. First, in April, Stanford Graduate School of Business opened its new $345 million Knight management Center. Then in November it announced a $150 million gift — its largest ever — from Robert and Dorothy King to promote innovation in the developing world.

3. The earthquake and tsunami that devastated parts of Japan demonstrated the limits of disaster giving when a rich nation is struck. Over time, and as the extent of the crisis became apparent, individuals and corporations rose to the occasion, showing that good disaster giving need not be immediate or impulsive.

4. The Asian Art Museum restructured $120 million in debt to stay open. Months later, it rebranded and repositioned itself to stay relevant.

5. $700 million later, the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund closed its doors following the deaths of its founders.

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