



How to Engage the Next Generation of Donors Now



Having many generations of donors ensures a pipeline of support for decades to come. Start thinking about that future today.

By Trista Harris

There's an intensive debate going on in nonprofit fundraising circles. One side believes it's a waste of time to cultivate young donors. They say, "Go where the money is, and it sure isn't with college-loan-saddled Gen-Xer's." The other side thinks that with a Facebook page and a dream they can wrap up their capital campaign because young donors will send five-figure checks the minute they get a Facebook Causes request. The truth is somewhere in between.

Who Are Gen X and Gen Y?

While the start and end date of each generation varies by researcher, for the purpose of this discussion Gen X is made up of people born between 1961–1983 and Gen Y (sometime referred to as Millennials) is made up of people born between 1984–2002.

Why Focus on Young People?

There are many reasons why nonprofits need to develop plans that include younger donors. The most important reason is that, contrary to public perception, young people give. According to research from the University of Indiana, generation alone doesn't make a difference in the amount donors contribute or the percentage who choose to support nonprofit organizations. Any differences in contribution amounts

among donors were associated with differences in income, education, and religious attendance.¹

Young donors also have a greater financial value to your organization over their lifetime, simply because there are more years that they can support you. In addition, your organization needs a diverse donor base to carry your message to a broader audience.²

Use These Seven Keys to Attract Young Donors

1. Treat them like donors. Many nonprofits immediately assume that young people with an interest in their organization are good volunteer prospects. That may be true, but don't immediately write them off as annual or even major donors. Cultivate them as you would any contributor.

2. Meet them face to face, not just on Facebook. Social media tools like Facebook and Twitter are a wonderful way for your nonprofit to reach new supporters, especially Gen X and Gen Y donors, who often use those tools. Let social media be one way to connect with donors but not the only way. Meeting donors and prospects in person or through peers is still an important development strategy.

3. Let them know your impact.

Donors want to hear how you're making a difference. This isn't just some passing phase; it's a permanent change in how much information donors want to receive about how their donations are making an impact. Twitter, Facebook, and your newsletter are great ways to state this case. Donors want you to use the communications channels they use. Since the chances that you'll be on CNN.com are small, get in their Facebook feed instead.

4. Help them help you. What's more useful to your organization—a donor who writes you a \$100 check and doesn't tell a soul or one who writes you a \$50 check and asks 350 Facebook friends to do the same? Millennials and Gen X donors are more likely to make giving a group activity using tools like Facebook Causes. Donor prospecting can be costly; reach out to donors who will do this prospecting for you for free.

5. Appeal to their sense of connectedness to the world. According to a study by Indiana University, Millennials are much more likely than any other generation to say that they give to "make the world a better place." Whether your organization is an international NGO or a local initiative to clean a watershed in your neighborhood, you're part of a larger global picture. Make that connection clear to donors in your case for support.

6. Don't put them at the little kids' table. It's condescending to

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induct someone onto a junior board if they're just holding a space with no real authority. If you really want a multi-generational perspective in your organization, you must have young people at the table where the real decisions are being made. If you're changing the diversity of your organization's board, you need to have three people from that group represented so that they have a real voice rather than being a token. If you want multiple generations represented, make sure you don't have one lone voice that's expected to represent all young people.

7. Give them their own space. When it comes to the social events that your organization holds, there's a place for young-professional-focused events. People want to spend their socializing time with their peers. If there's only one person under 50 at an event, the young professional probably won't come back next time. So build a space where young people can learn about your organization and have fun with their peers. A word of caution: Young-donor-focused events are an important part of a cultivation strategy, but don't let these events be the end of your engagement. Too many organizations start a young donor society or hold a special event but don't find other ways to reach out to young donors through publications, face-to-face meetings, or other annual events. Special events should be a starting point, not a substitute for real engagement.

Refer Your Young Donors to These Resources

Show young donors you care about them by connecting them to organizations and publications such as these:

Resource Generation (www.resourcegeneration.org) is a national organization that works with young people with financial wealth. Its purpose is to promote innovative ways for young people with wealth to align their values, vision, and financial resources to deepen their civic engagement.

21/64 (www.2164.net) offers services—including consulting, resource materials, networks, and communication tools—in times of generational transition. Today, with four generations above the age of 21 around philanthropic tables, multiple generations must learn to understand each others' "generational personalities," values, and visions. 21/64 helps multigenerational families define and achieve their individual and collective goals.

Synergos Global Philanthropy Circle, or GPC (www.synergos.org/philanthropistscircle) is a network of philanthropic families from across the world committed to using their time, influence, and resources to fight global poverty and social injustice. GPC hosts a number of affinity groups. One of them, the Next Generation Group, helps younger family members engage with their peers

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If you're looking to raise more funds, we can help.

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Organize Brown-Bag Get-Togethers

An easy way for your board members and other supporters to raise money is by hosting brown-bag lunches. Have them ask their co-workers to pack a lunch at home, bring it to work one day a week for a month, then donate the money they would have spent at a restaurant. Or, if they prefer, your supporters can conduct brown-bag fundraisers in their homes. Instead of meeting friends for lunch or dinner at a restaurant, they can invite them to bring a sack lunch to their home and then donate what they would have spent eating out.

Seek Donations of Service

Combine your next event with an auction, either silent, live, online, or all three, and ask your supporters to donate gifts of service. Examples:

- creation of a dress or other garment by someone skilled in sewing
- Web site design or redesign created by a graphic designer or college student
- dinner for one or more couples prepared in someone's home, especially if the cuisine is somewhat exotic
- car detailing by a local car dealer
- a prairie walk by someone who can discuss prairie plants.

Plunge into Fun

Ask supporters to gather pledges to jump in frigid lakes, as Wisconsin's Special Olympics does each winter throughout the state. The Polar Plunge has helped raise more than \$7 million in 10 years. Those who don't want to do a total plunge can take the "Big Toe Plunge" or "Pinky Plunge." Or if they're "Too Chicken to Plunge," there are special events for them, too. For more information, contact www.specialolympicswisconsin.org. For more creative fundraising ideas, see "Special Events Galore!" (www.stevensoninc.com).

Young Donors in Action



At the age of 25, Karen Pittelman decided to dissolve the \$3 million dollar trust fund that her family had set up for her and use the proceeds to support grassroots groups run by and for low-income women in Boston.

Jamie Schweser was a tutor in New Orleans when one of his 15-year-old students was arrested for drug charges and faced six years in prison. Jamie advocated for him and as a result the judge gave the student probation. That experience informed Jamie's views on the criminal justice system. While in his 20s Jamie put \$500,000 into the Beyond Prisons Fund. He works with an advisory board of eight long-time activists to promote alternatives to incarceration.



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to develop as global philanthropists.

Grand Street (www.grandstreetnetwork.net) offers a unique opportunity for young Jews to explore what it means to be in a family involved with Jewish philanthropy. Against a backdrop of a generational wealth transfer and changing dynamics in the American Jewish community, the Grand Street network is a place where young Jews (18-28 years old) who are involved or will be involved as leaders in their family's philanthropy come together.

Classified: How to Stop Hiding Your Privilege and Use It for Social Change by Karen Pittelman and Resource Generation, with illustrations by Molly Hein, is a guide for people with class privilege who are tired of cover-ups and ready to dig through the buried files and figure out how their privilege really works. Complete with comics, exercises, and personal stories, *Classified* gives its readers the tools they need to stop hiding their privilege and instead put it to work.

Creating Change through Family Philanthropy: The Next Generation, by Alison Goldberg, Karen Pittelman, and Resource Generation gives young people the tools they need not just to participate in philanthropy but help transform the field itself. Complete with personal stories and exercises, this guide is an essential resource for anyone who works with families with wealth. ■

Footnotes

¹See *Men, Women, X and Y: Generational and Gender Differences in Motivations for Giving* by Melissa Brown, Patrick Rooney, Hao Han, and Shaun Miller at <http://www.philanthropy.iupui.edu/womensphilanthropyinstitute/docs/GenderGenerationalDifferences.pdf>.

²For a snapshot of the types of young, wealthy professionals available, see "Who Are the Young Leaders?" by Emily Davis in *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 28, No. 6 (www.snpo.org/members).

WEBINAR – February 23, 2011, 1:00 PM EST

Join Trista for a new webinar: *How to Engage the Next Generation of Donors Now*. Visit www.snpo.org/lino



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