

# Millennial Donors

## A Study of Millennial Giving and Engagement Habits

a joint research project of



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# Millennial Donors

Millennial donors are different than donors from past generations – but not in the ways you might expect. Yes, technology and social media are integral parts of their lives, but these donors are driven by personal relationships and human connections. In this way, they are like more established donors and volunteers. And they expect to be treated as such.

As a result, we believe organizations need to realign their young-donor engagement strategies, with the expectation that this undertaking will not produce quick returns, but will deliver considerable long-term rewards.

To us, these survey results are reassuring, because they affirm our belief that that, even as new technologies shape our culture, donor engagement is increasing in importance rather than diminishing.

It's our hope that the information in this survey will help you prepare your organization to engage this new generation of donors. These young men and women have shown themselves to be willing and generous – your challenge is to approach and engage them in the best way.



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## executive summary

Millennial Generation donors want to be engaged in a different way than Baby Boomers or Generation X donors; however, contrary to what general perceptions might suggest, that doesn't mean you'll connect with them most successfully through social media appeals.

For the "2010 Millennial Donor Study," Achieve and Johnson Grossnickle Associates (JGA) asked more than 2,200 people between the ages of 20 and 40 across the U.S. about their giving habits and engagement preferences. Approximately 75% of the respondents represented Generation Y or Millennial donors. The results of the survey show a generation definitely connected by technology and social media, but more inspired to give and volunteer by personal engagement and human connections.

These results would suggest that nonprofit organizations seeking to tap into this new generation of donors will need to redesign their solicitation and engagement processes, treating these new givers more like their older peers in an effort that will not deliver a quick return on investment but will reward the organization over time.

As expected, Millennial donors are actively involved with Facebook and other social media, and comfortable with texting, but on questions regarding their preferred methods of staying in contact with family and friends, virtually all of the respondents say they rely on technology they might consider old-fashioned: email. More important to our purposes, perhaps, more than nine out of 10 respondents said they prefer to receive information from organizations via email, with Facebook coming in a distant third, behind even print communications. And while many of these donors also rely on email when learning about organizations, it's Google that serves as their primary resource for information.

And what do they want to know? By a large margin, the respondents reported being most interested in hearing about a nonprofit's programs and services (86.3%), and more than half (53.9%) said they want to receive updates on the organization's financial condition. However, this desire for meaningful communication does not suggest a desire for frequent contact. Most of the respondents would prefer to hear from organizations on a quarterly basis, while slightly more than a third would welcome a monthly communication, the standard for any organization that produces a newsletter.

Email also is popular as a means for giving: More than three-quarters of the respondents said they have used email to donate. Texting proved even more popular than Facebook for giving (18.2% vs. 14.3%), but it should be noted that this survey was conducted during the period of heavy text-based fundraising after the earthquake in Haiti.

Although one-hit social media campaigns have attracted a lot of attention in recent years, our study results suggest that such campaigns have limited potential for two reasons. First, the vast majority of our respondents are unlikely to volunteer for or donate to an organization the first they hear about it; second, survey participants showed a heavy preference for face-to-face solicitations over all others.

In fact, even email falls considerably from favor when juxtaposed with personal contact. When asked how likely they would be to donate based on methods of asking 66% of respondents said they would be likely or highly likely to respond to a face-to-face request, while only 37% said they would be likely or highly likely to give if asked via email. Results were similar when the donors were asked how likely they would be to volunteer based on methods of asking.

Another key factor in urging these donors to give is the nature of the request. More than half of the respondents said they are likely to respond to a specific request for a particular project, an emergency situation or an appeal that explains exactly what the money will be used for. Very few (7.7%) said they are likely or very likely to respond to a general, non-specific request, and 56.3% said they would not respond to an annual donation call.

What many of these donors will respond to is an opportunity to connect with leadership and have a voice in an organization's direction. The majority of respondents expressed an interest in having access to members of the board or executive leadership of the organizations they support. Three-quarters of respondents said they are at least somewhat interested in working closely with leadership on important matters, and more than two-thirds are at least somewhat interested in being involved in the development of strategy, direction or focus for the organization. Given such an opportunity, slightly more than 75% say they feel members of the board and leadership value their opinions. Unfortunately, only a little more than half (53.2%) of the survey respondents said they have access to members of the board or the executive leadership of the organizations they support.

The good news is that, once engaged, these donors seem more than willing to bring others onboard. Roughly seven out of 10 of the respondents said they would communicate with friends and family about ways to get involved in the organization, and about the same number said they would be willing to ask others to volunteer. The willingness fell off slightly when it came to asking for donations, however, with 51.6% of respondents saying they would be willing to ask family and friends for financial gifts.

So what do these results mean? First, they would seem to suggest that nonprofit organizations need to surrender many of the assumptions being made about Millennial donors and focus on engagement and personal connections to draw them into involvement and giving. And, furthermore, that organizations need to shift their attitudes, realign their staffs and engage this "low-capacity" audience in ways more typically reserved for donors with greater means.

We are not suggesting that nonprofit organizations should ignore technological advances or eschew social media. Quite the contrary: We believe technology and social media can be great tools for reaching this audience. However, long-term success will require that organizations marry these new tools with real personal engagement, reaping the benefits of connecting with a maturing generation of donors that not only are acquiring greater means but that also are willing to act as champions and evangelists.

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## key findings

- 91% of Millennial donors are at least somewhat likely to respond to a face-to-face request for money from a nonprofit organization, with 27 percent being highly likely to respond to such a request. Only 8 percent are highly likely to respond to an email request.
- 55.2% of Millennial donors are likely or highly likely to respond to a specific request or particular project. 55.7% are not likely to respond to a general, non-specific ask.
- 71.9% of Millennial donors don't need to volunteer for an organization before they donate.
- Millennial donors want to know details about the organizations they support: 86.3 percent want updates on programs or services, and 54.6 percent want information about the organization and its financial condition. 68 percent want information about volunteer opportunities.
- 60.5% say they would like access to board and executive leadership, and 53.2% say they have it.
- Asked who could get them to donate to an organization, most Millennial donors say they would be likely or highly likely to give if asked by a family member (74.6%) or a friend (62.8%). Only 37.8% would be likely or highly likely to give if asked by a coworker.
- 71.7% of Millennial donors said they'd be willing to communicate with friends and family about ways to be involved in an organization they support.
- Email is Millennial donors' most preferred communication method, with 93% of respondents favoring it for receiving information from organizations. Facebook and print lag behind at 23.8% and 26.9%, respectively.
- When a Millennial donor uses technology to find out about a nonprofit organization, Google is the donor's first stop, with 86.4% of respondents citing the search engine. 71.5% rely on email, and 51.2% use Facebook to find information on organizations.



***"I really have a passion for making the world a better place, and wish I had more opportunities to do so. Being a part of making the big picture decisions for organizations I care about would be a great learning experience and would really give me the sense that I was making a difference."***



### **About Achieve**

Achieve is a consulting firm that provides expert guidance and delivers strategies to strengthen donor relationships and increase fundraising performance. Achieve works with nonprofit organizations that need to build the skills of its fundraising department, acquire resources for new and existing needs, and engage donors in meaningful ways.

[www.AchieveGuidance.com](http://www.AchieveGuidance.com).



### **About JGA**

Johnson, Grossnickle and Associates (JGA) has been providing authentic, strategic philanthropic consulting services to non-profit clients since 1994. JGA's team of senior consultants offers client-focused, highly customized philanthropic consulting services to private colleges, independent schools, and large cultural and community organizations. JGA specializes in capital campaign counsel, feasibility studies, philanthropic assessments, and development audits.

[www.jgacounsel.com](http://www.jgacounsel.com).