



SERIES REPORT

# Engaging the Next Generations in Healthcare Philanthropy

Practical advice for building long-term donor relationships with Gen X and Millennials

May 2026



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## Introduction

Healthcare philanthropy is in the midst of a generational shift.

It's a shift that many organizations recognize, but few feel prepared to address. As long-standing donors age and donor counts decline, foundations are asking important questions about who their future supporters will be and how relationships with them should begin.

This Core Insight report explores how healthcare organizations are beginning to engage the next generation of donors, particularly Gen X and Millennials. Drawing from a member-wide survey, webinar discussion, and real-world examples, the report offers perspective on where the field stands today and why you need to start thinking about this now to protect your pipeline.



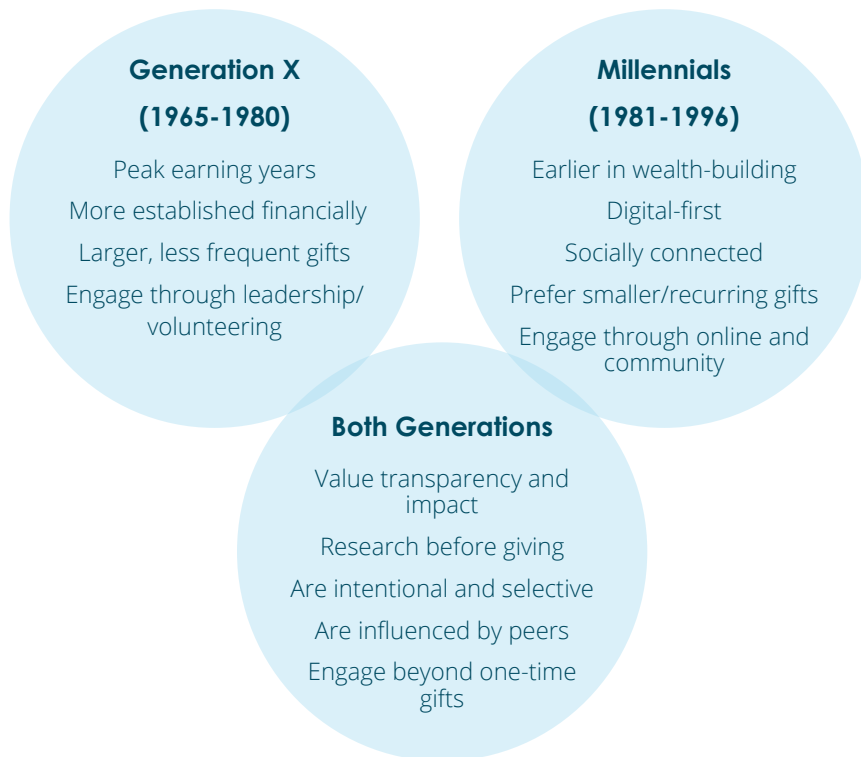
# Defining “Next Generation”

For this report, “next generation” donors include:

- Generation X (born 1965–1980)
- Millennials (born 1981–1996)

These two generations represent different life stages, financial realities, and engagement preferences. Across both generations, however, expectations are higher. Giving is more intentional and less transactional and donors expect (and sometimes demand) transparency. Gen Xers and Millennials want to understand where their money is going, its impact, and how their involvement fits into your mission.

Explore our donor profiles →





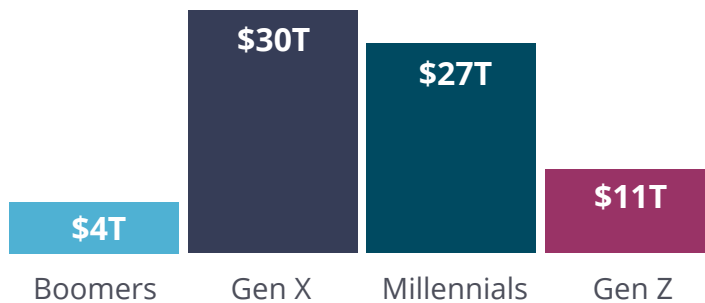
# The Great Wealth Transfer

At the center of this transition is a historic wealth transfer. Over the next 20 years, an estimated \$84 trillion will move from Baby Boomers and older donors to charities and heirs: approximately \$12 trillion to charitable causes and \$72 trillion to Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z.

This matters because the path to giving is changing. Many younger donors are making more careful choices about where they give than their parents and grandparents. Support is often tied closely to clear impact and alignment, rather than institutional loyalty.

Healthcare philanthropy faces a pivotal moment. Traditional donor strategies remain essential, but are no longer enough alone. Cultivation must begin now, building relationships and trust with younger generations to secure the future.

Figure 1: Estimated wealth to be inherited through 2045, by generation



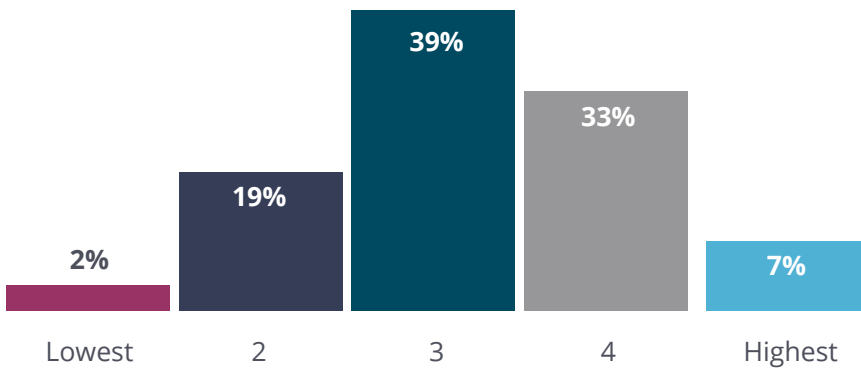
Source: [Cerulli Associates research](#)



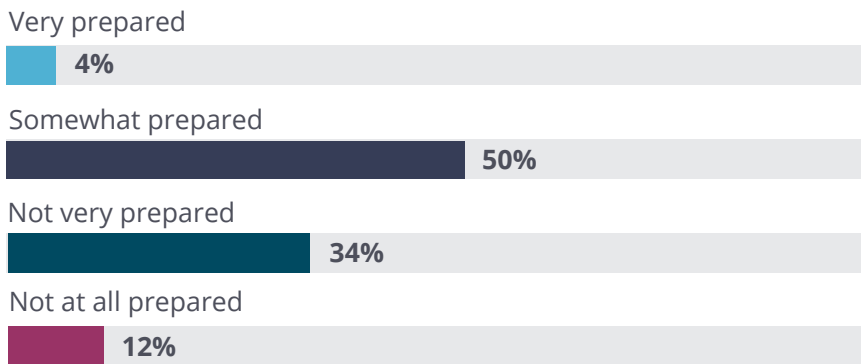
# Survey Findings

This spring, AHP surveyed organizations on how they are currently engaging different age demographics and the strategies employed to reach Gen X and Millennial donors.

## How high of a priority is engaging Gen X and Millennials for your foundation?



## How prepared do you feel your organization is for the next generations of healthcare donors?

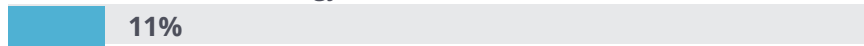


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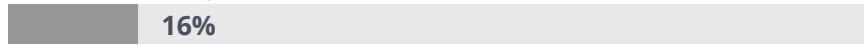
philanthropy professionals surveyed about how they engage younger donors

### When does your organization plan to meaningfully expand its strategy to engage younger donors?

We have an active strategy now



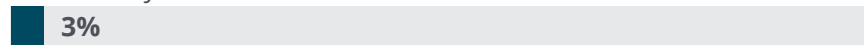
Within the next year



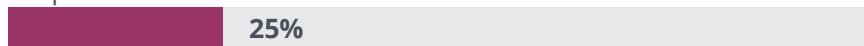
Within 2-3 years



Within 3-5 years



No plans



### Does your organization have a defined strategy to engage Gen X and Millennial donors?



Yes, informal  
No, but discussions are underway  
No strategy in place

Yes, documented and implemented

### Is responsibility for engaging younger donors formally assigned?



Yes, to 2+ areas  
No responsibility assigned

Yes, to a single functional area

### When responsibility is assigned to one functional area, which is it?



Major giving  
Marketing & communications  
Annual giving

Donor relations



# Insights from the Survey

## Priority Is High, But Readiness Lags Behind

Although two-thirds of survey respondents rated engaging the next generation of donors as a priority, only a tiny percentage (4%) feel very prepared. The gap between urgency and preparedness reflects a reality many teams already recognize. Next generation engagement is widely acknowledged, but it often sits alongside other pressing priorities rather than being fully integrated into day to day work. Put simply, the challenge isn't believing in the importance of engaging younger donors, it's making room and creating structure to move it forward amid other priorities.

4%

feel very prepared

## Action Is Often Pushed to “Later”

Timing matters, and many organizations are still waiting; 89% of organizations surveyed are delaying action or not planning to act at all. Most foundations say they plan to expand their engagement strategy in the next two to three years. That signals intent, but it also underscores the gap between recognition and action. Donor expectations are already shifting, and the relationships that will influence future giving are forming now.

89%

delaying action

## Strategy and Ownership Remain Unclear

Looking more closely at why readiness feels low, two things stand out: strategy and ownership. Forty-five percent of respondents report having no strategy for engaging younger donors, and 72% say there is no clear ownership of this work.

72%

lack clear ownership

In many organizations, the work of engaging younger donors spans several teams: annual giving, marketing, major gifts, and

donor relations. That shared responsibility makes it difficult to set direction and build momentum.

## Lack of Data Creates Blind Spots

Data plays a critical role in readiness, yet for many it remains one of the biggest barriers to engagement.

Most organizations are collecting age data; about 76% are capturing it somewhere in their systems. But nearly 8 in 10 do not regularly report giving or engagement by age. This limits visibility into some of the most basic strategic questions:

- Are younger donors already giving?
- How are their giving patterns changing over time?
- Which engagement tactics lead to retention or deeper involvement?

That gap is especially clear in grateful patient work. While roughly 70% of organizations conduct outreach, only 45% use age-based thresholds to determine who is included, and far fewer track engagement or giving outcomes after outreach occurs.

## Channels Are Active, But Often Disconnected

About half of organizations are actively engaging Gen X and Millennials using email, social media, and events. One-third use direct mail, and a small percentage are reaching out via text. There is a perception that engaging younger donors needs to be “social,” but without active testing and monitoring, it is unclear which of these channels is truly effective.

And activity alone isn't the issue. When there isn't clarity about how those channels are meant to build on one another, engagement often feels brief and episodic; more outreach doesn't necessarily lead to the deeper connection we need.

76%

collect age data

22%

report giving or engagement by age



# Best Practices to Engage Younger Donors

As you work to engage the next generation of donors, it's common to wonder where to focus your time and energy. A few clear practices are emerging, reflecting what organizations like yours are doing when they begin to see meaningful progress—even with limited time and resources.

## 1. Start Relationships Earlier Than Giving

Organizations seeing traction with Gen X and Millennial donors are beginning relationships well before financial capacity is expected.

Rather than waiting for readiness to give, start focusing on early exposure: helping people understand the mission, see impact, and build familiarity over time. This is essential because these cohorts prioritize experiential proof over institutional prestige; they want to see the impact they will make before they commit to making it. Giving becomes a natural next step, not the starting point.

### WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

Invitations to learn, observe, or engage that don't include an immediate ask.

Younger donors don't want to inherit philanthropy. They want to participate in it.

## 2. Treat Engagement as Its Own Outcome

An important shift is separating engagement success from fundraising success. Instead of viewing non-financial interactions as failed asks, it's time to start treating them as necessary milestones in the donor journey.

This shift means valuing early signs of connection, repeat interaction, deeper involvement, and leadership interest as indicators of progress, allowing you to invest in relationships without pressure to justify every interaction in dollars.

#### WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

Reporting engagement indicators alongside fundraising results, not just after a gift is made.

### 3. Explain Healthcare Before Asking for Support

Healthcare philanthropy is complex, and younger donors often disengage when they don't understand how systems work. Unlike older generations, they are less likely to fund a general need and more likely to support a specific cause they fully comprehend.

Invest time in explaining how care is delivered, where funding gaps exist, and how philanthropy fits in, to build more trust and patience over time.

#### WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

Messaging and experiences that translate into the healthcare environment, not just promoting programs.

### 4. Align Channels Around a Clear Story

Aligning channels has always mattered in fundraising, but it is especially important when engaging Gen X and Millennial audiences. These donors move fluidly between email, social media, and organizational websites in a single session. For these donors, consistency equals credibility.

Rather than adding more channels, focus on making your existing ones work together. When your digital content, events, and follow-ups reinforce the same core message—focusing on

the utility of the gift and real-world health outcomes—it builds a cohesive brand experience.

#### WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

Messages that build on one another instead of starting over with each interaction.

## 5. Create Visible Paths Beyond Giving Dollars

Gen X and Millennial donors often want to contribute more than money. Organizations that offer clear pathways to leadership, advocacy, or advisory roles are more likely to retain engaged supporters over time. If all your calls to action currently end in dollar signs, it's time to draft non-financial entry points, such as advisory councils or peer-to-peer advocacy toolkits, that invite donors to lead rather than just fund.

#### WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

Opportunities to participate, advise, or lead that are intentional, timebound, and clearly connected to the mission.

## 6. Support a Longer View at the Leadership Level

One of the strongest predictors of success is leadership alignment, especially at the Board level. Your foundation will make more progress engaging younger donors when your Board understands why next generation engagement is a long-term investment, not a short-term revenue strategy. This patience creates room for experimentation, learning, and sustained relationship building.

#### WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

Board conversations that focus on pipeline health, not just annual results.



# AHP Member Case Studies

## Saint Mary's Foundation: *up next* Program

### What It Is

*Up next* is an engagement program for emerging professionals ages 25 to 45, created to introduce the next generation to healthcare philanthropy before asking for financial support.

### How It Works

Participants take part in behind the scenes experiences—hospital tours, physician shadowing, leadership conversations, and volunteer opportunities—to better understand how the health system works and how philanthropy supports patient care.

### What's Different

Participants are not asked to give as part of the program. The focus is on learning, access, and building trust early, with the understanding that giving and leadership may come later.

### Why It Matters

Many participants go on to become donors, board members, and long-term ambassadors, showing the value of engagement that begins well before capacity.

### Core Takeaway

With Gen X and Millennials' desire for transparency and impact, sharing behind-the-scenes content and meaningful engagement opportunities invites a deep, personal, and lasting connection.

“Almost every person from our very first *up next* class is still engaged more than a decade later.”

MICHELLE  
RABIDEAU

President at  
Saint Mary's  
Foundation

## LifeBridge Health: Leadership Society

### What It Is

The Leadership Society is a two year program for Gen X and Millennial donors that combines education, peer connection, and collective giving.

### How It Works

After learning directly from organizational leaders about real needs across the system, participants contribute annually to a shared giving pool and work together to allocate the funds.

### What's Different

Participants are trusted with decision making authority, giving them a clear view of how philanthropy works and how their support creates impact.

### Why It Matters

The program has become a pipeline for both donors and leaders, with many alumni moving on to Board and committee roles.

### Core Takeaway

Engagement deepens when donors are given real agency—and time—to help shape outcomes, not just support them. Giving Gen X and Millennials the opportunity to choose the program to fund, after directly hearing how it will create impact, builds a lifelong connection to healthcare philanthropy.

“Most Society members are not users of healthcare, so we design programs that make sense for their lives.”

DANNI LYLES  
 Director, Annual Giving at  
 LifeBridge Health

# Implementation Corner

In 2024, Hurricane Helene devastated the community where my brother’s family lives. Looking to help, I researched local, on-the-ground charities. Rather than hoping our dollars would be used wisely by a large national organization, I instead donated to a food bank 15 miles from their home.

This story illustrates how I believe philanthropy is changing: away from blind institutional trust, and toward **giving rooted in personal connection and visible impact.**

Gen X and Millennials demand different treatment from non-profits: to be partners, not just asked for money. To engage on a personal level and see how their gifts make a tangible difference. And as this report shows, most of us are not prepared for this change.

It’s true that many Gen X and Millennials aren’t active healthcare users or donors... *yet*. But most mid-level donors first become involved with the causes they regularly support in their 20s and 30s<sup>1</sup>: today’s Gen Z and Millennials.

**The time to begin engaging these generations—and building our future pipelines—is now.** It means investing in a digital-first program, bolstering gratitude efforts, and creating pathways for meaningful education and impact reporting.

It also means fundamentally changing the way we engage our donors. Because if we continue to rely on the same print solicitation and lackluster stewardship efforts, we will see our future donor base disengage and disappear.

The road ahead will challenge our status quo and compel us to behave differently—to show true, genuine, and frequent gratitude to donors of every level, every time. And I, for one, am ready to go. Are you?



**BETH HATCHER**  
Principal + CEO at  
Beth Interactive  
(and Proud  
Millennial)

<sup>1</sup> The Chronicle of Philanthropy, [Midlevel Donors Offer Fundraisers a Huge Opportunity Amid Declines in Giving](#), 3/14/24



# How to Get Started

The challenge of engaging the next generations is rarely a lack of insight, interest, or ideas. Most leaders already understand why this work matters; what's missing is structure.

The strongest predictor of progress is whether efforts are clearly defined, supported by leadership, and measured in ways that reflect long-term relationship building. Without that clarity, engagement often becomes everyone's priority and no one's responsibility.

Moving this work forward requires clarity in three areas.

## 1. Appoint a Clear Owner

Someone must be responsible for engaging Gen X and Millennial donors—not for executing every tactic, but for ensuring the work moves forward. This looks like:

- One clearly identified owner for next generation engagement
- Authority to coordinate across teams (annual giving, marketing, events, major gifts, etc.)
- Accountability for noticing gaps, patterns, and progress

## 2. Expand How Success Is Defined

Many organizations delay action because success feels difficult to justify without immediate revenue. Yet meaningful signals of progress often appear long before giving capacity does—and they are important markers of pipeline health. Early indicators to value include:

- Repeat engagement over time, such as clicking on emails and sharing social media posts
- Increased understanding of how healthcare philanthropy works
- Continued participation without a financial ask
- Interest in leadership, advisory, or advocacy roles

### 3. Align Leadership Around the Long View

Organizations make more progress when leadership—especially boards—shares that understanding. When leadership expectations are aligned, teams have permission to invest in relationships without constantly justifying them in dollars.

This requires patience for outcomes that build gradually, along with clear conversations about timeframes and early indicators of progress. Most importantly, it calls for a shift in dialogue away from short-term results and toward long-term pipeline growth.

#### Tomorrow' Donors, Today's Priority

Building relationships with Gen X and Millennials depends on shared understanding about priorities, ownership, how progress is defined, and the time relationships need to develop. Ultimately, this work reflects the same long-term commitment that has always defined healthcare philanthropy: investing early, stewarding thoughtfully, and planning with the future in mind.

But commitment alone is no longer enough; this work must start now. Organizations that begin planning and implementing these strategies today will secure a distinct competitive advantage in the next five to 10 years. The future of healthcare philanthropy belongs to those who build it today.



# Donor Profiles

While generational labels are imperfect, they provide a helpful lens for understanding how life stage and experience shape engagement. These profiles are intended to help you move beyond a one size fits all approach and instead align strategies, timelines, and success measures to where donors actually are.

1928-1945

## Silent Generation

What They Bring	What Resonates	Strategy
Legacy giving, long memory, deep loyalty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritize personal stewardship and continuity</li> <li>• Emphasize legacy, stability, and institutional impact</li> <li>• Provide clear follow through on how gifts made a difference</li> </ul>	Honor existing relationships and legacy commitments while preparing for transition and knowledge transfer

1946-1964

## Baby Boomers

What They Bring	What Resonates	Strategy
Sustained giving, gratitude driven support, leadership history	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invest in consistent stewardship and recognition</li> <li>• Connect giving to long-term outcomes and institutional strength</li> <li>• Engage as mentors, ambassadors, or legacy champions</li> </ul>	Support retention and planned giving while demonstrating how the organization is preparing for the future

1965-1980

## Generation X

What They Bring	What Resonates	Strategy
Peak earning power, leadership potential, strategic thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide clear impact reporting and outcomes</li> <li>• Offer leadership, advisory, or decision roles</li> <li>• Respect time by making engagement efficient and meaningful</li> </ul>	Treat Gen X as a bridge generation: committed donors today and organizational leaders tomorrow

1981-1996

## Millennials

What They Bring	What Resonates	Strategy
Long-term potential, intentional giving, advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin engagement before significant asks</li> <li>• Explain how healthcare systems work and where philanthropy fits</li> <li>• Track engagement indicators, not just gifts</li> </ul>	Measure success through trust, repeat engagement, and understanding, not immediate revenue

1997-2012

## Generation Z

What They Bring	What Resonates	Strategy
Awareness, advocacy, future pipeline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasize participation, learning, and transparency</li> <li>• Offer low-barrier engagement (volunteering, events, storytelling)</li> </ul>	Build familiarity and trust now, recognizing that philanthropy may come later



## Further Reading

- [Preparing for the Future: Engaging the Next Generations in Healthcare Philanthropy](#) (AHP, 2026)
- [The Next Generation of Philanthropy](#) (Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, 2025)
- [Nonprofit Fundraising Statistics to Boost Results in 2026](#) (Double the Donation, 2026)
- [How Different Generations Give - Four Things You Need to Know](#) (AFP, 2024)
- [Charitable Giving Statistics](#) (National Philanthropic Trust, 2024)
- [Fundraising Trend: Gen X and Millennial Importance](#) (Nonprofit Fundraising, 2024)
- [Your Guide to Finding, Engaging, and Retaining the Next Donor Generation](#) (CCS Fundraising, 2024)
- [Midlevel Donors Offer Fundraisers a Huge Opportunity Amid Declines in Giving](#) (The Chronicle of Philanthropy, 2024) [subscription required]
- [Will the 'Great Wealth Transfer' Transform the Markets?](#) (Merrill, 2023)
- [Giving Trends: The Role of Age and Income in Charitable Giving](#) (Giving USA, 2023)
- [6 Generations of Giving: Who Gives the Most and How They Prefer to Give](#) (Nonprofit Tech for Good, 2023)
- [Trust Across Generations: Different But the Same](#) (Ipsos, 2023)

- [A Look at Generational Giving Donor Trends and Influences](#) (NonProfit PRO, 2022)
- [Comparing and Contrasting: How Different Generations Give](#) (Charitable Impact, 2022)
- [Generational Giving: Generation X Fundraising Trends, Preferences, and Patterns](#) (Qgiv, 2020)
- [Generational Giving: Millennial Giving Trends, Preferences, and Patterns](#) (Qgiv, 2020)
- [The Next Generation of American Healthcare Giving](#) (Blackbaud Institute for Philanthropic Impact, 2019)
- [The Neglected Generation X](#) (The Chronicle of Philanthropy, 2016)