


Everything You Know About Generational Giving is Wrong

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We've all heard the same generational giving narrative before — Boomers give the most and Millennials are not worth much effort to cultivate.

Yet, just like how we've been told that Millennials are responsible for killing off Blockbuster video and the napkin industry, the true story is much more complex.

In a session I presented at the [AFP New Orleans chapter annual conference](#), I used data to unpack the realities of generational giving. This recap will cover the ways **nonprofits can structure retention and acquisition campaigns to excite donors of all ages**, regardless of their thoughts on avocado toast.

What are the generations?



The Matures (1927 – 1945)

The Matures grew up during the Korean and Vietnam Wars. My favorite quote to sum up this generation: "Retirement means sitting in a rocking chair and living your final days in peace."



Baby Boomers (1946 – 1964)

These are the yuppies and the “me” generation — meaning they’re optimistic, team-oriented, and driven. Baby Boomers envision technology as needing a learning curve.



Generation X (1965 – 1980)

This generation is cynical, with the feeling that things have “failed” them. When it comes to technology, they are beginning to see the transitions that tech brings. In general, they are cautious and unimpressed with authority (even though they are becoming the authority now).



Millennials (1981 – 2000)

Millennials (sometimes referred to as Gen Y) are optimistic, face academic pressure, work well in teams, and are digitally literate. Their thinking is fast paced with immediate processing, and they have the need to give feedback regardless of position or authority.



Generation Z or “Boomlets” (after 2001)

Gen Z will actually be our future overlords, with births in 2006 outnumbering the start of the Baby Boomer generation. Also, many of them are Latino.

Breakdown of Generational Giving

OK, so now we know the generations. But how are each of these generational segments donating? Here are the generational giving numbers:

The Matures

- 27.1 million donors
- 26% of all giving
- 88% give to charities
- \$1,367 average gift
- Support emergency relief, troops, the arts, and election campaigns

Baby Boomers

- 51 million donors
- 43% of all giving
- 72% give

- \$1,212 average gift
- Support first responder organizations
- Financial accountability is key to these donors

Generation X

- 39.5 million donors
- 20% of all giving
- 59% give
- \$732 average gift
- Support health services, animal rights, and environmental protection

Millennials

- 32.8 million donors
- 11% of all giving
- 84% give
- \$481 average gift
- Support human rights, child development, victims of abuse/crime

Generation Z

- 30% already have donated to a charity
- 60% want their work to make a difference
- 1 in 10 want to start a charity

(Source: BlackBaud Next Generation report)

So...Why is Everything Wrong?

As the numbers show, the facts behind generational giving don't match up with the narratives nonprofits have heard for years. It turns out those coveted Millennials are actually donating on par with older generations, and the generational giving divide may not be as sharp as we thought. But why? Turns out there are a few factors.

Changes in Media Consumption

According to [Deloitte](#), changes in media consumption habits — mainly streaming services — have blurred the lines between generations. They've even gone as far to rebrand Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z as one segment: "MilleXZials."

	Magazines	Newspapers	Radio	TV	Internet
Boomers	9.2	17.9	33.8	70.7	16.5
Gen X	9.1	14.4	25.3	55.1	18.3
Millennials	8.9	11.9	34.6	49.4	23.4

Media consumption habits by generation. Magazines: number of issues read in a month. Newspapers: number read in 28 day period. Radio: half hours listened. TV: half hours watched in a week. Internet: average hours per week.

Even though each generation may have its own unique preferences, it turns out that people of different ages aren't all that different. Ultimately, everyone appreciates convenience and personalization.

Appeals & Generations

Even though online giving makes up less than 8% of all giving, it's often touted as the #1 strategy for reaching younger generations. To be fair, online giving is rising every year, driven by Millennial preferences — and an optimized online donation form definitely won't hurt your organization's fundraising. But research shows that more traditional strategies still work for all donors, regardless of age.

Direct mail fundraising is responsible for 60 – 80% of all fundraising revenue. Yup, direct mail is definitely not dead. In fact, 37% of donors cite receiving direct mail as the reason they gave, regardless of they gave. (*Source: USPS*)

Events are also huge, especially for younger generations. According to the Chronicle of Philanthropy, **90% of donors prefer to give in person**. But don't start planning your gala just yet. Donors are shifting more toward peer-to-peer, DIY fundraising — and revenue from this type of fundraising has increased by 84% in just two years.

Action Items: Concrete Steps We Can All Take

1. Multi-Channel Campaigns

As we saw above, all generations consume media in many different ways. Your nonprofit can leverage this with a multi-channel campaign. These campaigns include touchpoints across several channels, from email to direct mail to social media to in-person. According to NextAfter, these types of campaigns can lead to a **204% higher conversion rate**.

2. Two Segments

To help create more effective fundraising campaigns, think of your donors in (at least) two basic segments: **recurring donors & major donors**. Regardless of generation, these groups are fundamentally different audiences who have different engagement needs.

In general, segmenting donors by action (like major vs. recurring donors) will help you build better supporter relationships than segmenting by demographics (like age).

3. Keep it Donor-Centric

No matter what strategies you use to engage donors, remember to keep it focused on each donor and their needs. You might have a Gen Z donor that prefers print mailings, and a Mature donor that only wants to be contacted via email.

Generational giving stats can help point us in the right direction, but **listening to our donors and giving them options for personalized engagement is key to success**. Think about how your organization is engaging supporters, and how you can leverage your tools to create more personalized experiences at scale.

About

Tim Sarrantonio

Tim Sarrantonio is a team member at NeonCRM and has more than 10 years of experience working for and volunteering with nonprofits. He has raised over \$3 million for various causes, engaged and enhanced databases of all sizes, procured multiple successful grants, and formulated innovative communications and fundraising campaigns for several nonprofits. A two time TEDx speaker, he has been invited to speak at numerous Association of Fundraising Professionals conferences, the Nonprofit Technology Conference, and for internationally recognized nonprofit leaders like GuideStar and Chronicle of Philanthropy. He volunteers heavily in his home of Niskayuna, NY.

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