



# A GENERATION FOR CAUSES

A Four-Year Summary of the Millennial Impact Project

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# From the Lead Researcher

## OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS, I'VE HEARD A LOT OF ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT MILLENNIALS

and their collective habits. Often, these assumptions lean more on cynical labels and negative generalizations than on hard evidence. Many experts have deemed Millennials the “Me Generation,” claiming they’re lazy and entitled, even narcissistic.

We knew that these insights, regardless of whether you agreed with them or not, only offered a partial look at this rising generation. There was much more to their story, and we wanted to help tell it.

Several years ago, I began working with a team of researchers, idealists and successful entrepreneurs who shared my vision of the potential the next generation holds. Through research, not assumptions, we already knew that with few exceptions, Millennials were willing and eager to “do good.” Now, after listening to more than 16,000 Millennials over the course of four years, we have seen the identity of this generation shaped by its members’ own affinities as donors, board members, advocates and volunteers. Though the ways they work with causes have varied from those of their parents, Millennials as a generation have not been as apathetic, self-centered or egotistical as some might think.

As organizations and companies across the globe began to see ways Millennials differ from other generations, our team recognized the need to learn how to reach this new audience and capture their passions, drive and age-specific characteristics in order to draw them into a cause. Out of this need for understanding arose the Millennial Impact Project.

From the beginning, our desire has been to provide research-based information about Millennials to companies and causes trying to understand and better engage their donors, volunteers and employees.

In the following summary sponsored by the Case Foundation, we’ve compiled research from the four years of the Millennial Impact Project. You’ll discover, as we have, real evidence showing that Millennials are anything but lazy and self-centered. Millennials are inspired to give and volunteer passionately.

We’re here to help organizations show Millennials how to connect, get involved with and give to causes as a means of changing their communities.



**DERRICK FELDMANN**

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# THE MILLENNIAL IMPACT

## A LOOK BACK

In 2010, before we conducted the survey that launched the Millennial Impact Project, we noticed some specific characteristics—both research-based and anecdotal—that helped to identify this generation: highly educated, cause-driven, liberal leaning, collaborative in nature and connected online. These characteristics, which our own research shows remains true today, helped to inspire our initial research.

We identified several trends. Younger donors and volunteers seem to engage with causes differently than did their parents and the generations before them. Millennials tend to be more loyal to causes and issues than to organizations and institutions. Millennials use technology to share information and learn more about causes. And they ask questions more directed at an organization's operations and call on them to increase their transparency.

With these trends in mind, we recognized that previous studies assessing Millennial donors and volunteers from the cause's point of view already existed or were underway. **Thus, we created the Millennial Impact Report to give the Millennials a voice, and allow them to express their preferences and describe their interest in causes.** In order to gather the qualitative research we needed, we created surveys and facilitated focus groups that have allowed Millennials to speak. And in hearing the Millennial viewpoint, we have come to better understand and anticipate their behaviors.

When we began looking at how Millennials engage with causes, we first had to decide what "engagement" really entails. We decided that engagement is how Millennials **connect, involve and give** to and with causes about which they care. *Connection* includes how Millennials discover and communicate with a cause, ranging from the first time they sign up for more information to their actions on mobile communication and social media. *Involvement* includes small actions, such as microvolunteering, all the way up to board leadership. *Giving* includes both smaller and larger donations, as well as peer fundraising and soliciting donations on behalf of the cause. These forms of action and interaction – connect, involve, give – combine to help us measure and understand Millennial engagement.

### The Millennial Impact Project

4 years of research

More than 16,000 participants

More than 50 research partners

### Why Millennials?

Age: 20–32

80 million Millennials  
in the U.S.

Spending \$300  
billion annually

Will make up 50%  
of the workforce by 2020

# METHOD

## SHIFTS REFLECT EVOLUTION OF MILLENNIAL ENGAGEMENT

The methodology behind the Millennial Impact Study has evolved over the past four years, with a central survey backed by research partners at its core. Each year, we partner with various institutions and organizations to disseminate the survey to and solicit responses from their Millennial constituents.

Here's how the research has evolved:

- In the first year (2010), we partnered with five institutions to promote online surveys; all survey data was compiled and analyzed in aggregate.
- For the 2011 Millennial Donor survey, we gave each institution a unique link to an online survey with identical questions across all partner institutions.
- For the 2012 Millennial Impact Report, we added a qualitative method – focus groups – and conducted a nonprofit professional survey to garner more data.
- For 2013, we gathered information from an online survey distributed to Millennials through 14 research partners and conducted usability testing of nine nonprofits' digital presence in addition to focus groups.

# KEY INSIGHTS

## WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED IN THE LAST FOUR YEARS

In our four years of Millennial research, we have identified four key findings and watched their evolution each year

### 1. Millennials engage with causes to help other people, not institutions.

#### **We found early on that friends and peers motivate a Millennial's passion for a specific cause.**

In addition to peer influence, involvement is inspired by how the Millennial can visibly cause some sort of change or tangibly help change someone's life for the better. In our first study (2010), Millennials' top motivations for getting involved or volunteering with a nonprofit included working with a cause they are passionate about, meeting new people who care about the same cause, and being able to lend pro-bono skills and expertise to a charity.

#### **As time went on, we saw the following distinctions emerge:**

#### **MILLENNIALS SUPPORT ISSUES RATHER THAN ORGANIZATIONS.**

Ultimately, they want to support a cause, help other people, and become part of a community (digital and in-person) that's equally excited and eager to make a difference. Our most recent studies show that Millennials first support causes they are interested in, so the responsibility lays with organizations to inspire and show Millennials how their support can make have a tangible effect. Organizations have the opportunity to be conduits of causes, rather than the causes themselves. Millennials are most likely to donate to a nonprofit when they feel inspired and the organization is able to stimulate their personal interests through peers and digital marketing. The most successful organizations show Millennials specific examples of how their gifts will affect an individual in need of help.

#### **MILLENNIALS PREFER TO PERFORM SMALLER ACTIONS BEFORE FULLY COMMITTING TO A CAUSE.**

The majority of Millennial volunteers and donors seem to enter a cause by first completing smaller actions rather than making a long-term commitment. Millennials are more motivated to "Like" a Facebook page, share a video or attend an event before participating in higher states of engagement. But the stronger their relationship with an organization, the more likely they are to give larger gifts over time.

We found in later studies that Millennials' interactions with nonprofit organizations are more impulsive and immediate. When inspired, they will act quickly – from small donations to short volunteer stints – provided that the opportunities are present and the barriers to entry are low.

Millennials are consistent in their desire to see exactly how time, talent and dollars translate into people helped. They want their contributions, no matter the type or amount, to achieve actual results for a cause. Members of this generation are more likely to give smaller amounts to multiple organizations than to focus their giving on any one recipient.

Millennials are most likely to give volunteer time if they know their efforts will make a tangible difference in someone's life. They tend to get "hands on" with causes they care about when an organization can offer a range of volunteer opportunities, from one-time, episodic commitments to long-term, pro-bono or skills-based opportunities. Ultimately, they want to lend their knowledge, expertise, and time to help the people or issues the organization touches. And when this generation forms long-term volunteer relationships, they tend to give larger gifts and encourage their friends and family to contribute, too.

## 2. Millennials are influenced by the decisions and behaviors of their peers.

**Peer influence plays an important role in motivating Millennials to volunteer, attend events, participate in programs and give.** Our four surveys consistently have confirmed that the influence of an individual on his or her friends is substantial.

The vast majority of Millennials prefer to learn about volunteering opportunities through their peers. And even if Millennials can't give as much as other demographic groups, they're willing to help raise funds for causes they care about, usually by calling on friends and family.

This peer influence appears quite noticeably in social technology and often begins in self-organized, small groups, such as five friends who attend a volunteer event. Higher levels of engagement can branch out of this initial peer influence, leading to a larger role where the Millennial becomes a type of activist for the cause. The Volunteer Continuum we discovered in 2012 exemplifies this, as does the peer engagement data we received over the course of the past four years.



Our survey results reinforce the fact that as Millennials transition into a career and eventually a family, the ways in which they might get involved vary. It is important for nonprofits to create a continuum of volunteer opportunities, from one-time volunteer projects, microvolunteer projects that take little time, and opportunities to volunteer with friends or family, to leadership roles that utilize their professional skills. More so, Millennials don't enjoy feeling taken for granted, and they desire important leadership roles in causes they care most about, even if they can't commit large financial donations presently.

# KEY INSIGHTS

## WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED IN THE LAST FOUR YEARS

### 3. Millennials treat their time, money, and assets as having equal value.

**Millennials see assets related to time, money, skills, etc., as having equal value when given to a cause.**

Interestingly, the survey results also show that Millennials consistently view both their network and their voice as two additional types of assets they can offer a cause. Aided by technology, an individual who donates his or her voice may still give skills, time, and money, then go beyond these actions to advocacy. Donating one's network involves capitalizing on professional and personal relationships to expose others to a cause.

According to our surveys, the top three factors that spur Millennials to engage in a cause are being passionate about the issue, meeting like-minded people, and enhancing their expertise. They want to lend their knowledge and experience as well as time to help a cause, which has not changed over the last four years of survey responses.

### 4. Millennials need to experience the cause's work without having to be on site.

**Millennials have notably grown in their desire for and attraction to imagery and video.**

They use these media elements to vicariously experience the need and see how their small action can help alleviate it. To create this valuable opportunity, visuals must focus on the story behind the cause. This was clear in our 2010 research and has remained so: In 2013, more than 60% of respondents said they felt most invested in a cause when the nonprofit shared a compelling story about successful projects or the people it helps. In 2012, many participants in the study said they would give to whatever inspires them in the moment.

Equally important as the visuals and compelling stories is the platform on which those elements are delivered. Our 2010 study reflects a high use of Facebook by Millennials seeking to learn about and engage with a cause. Over time, we also have seen a rise in more visually based platforms, including Instagram, Pinterest, etc.

Our studies reveal, however, that once they engage through social media, Millennials greatly prefer donating through a specific online donation portal. Social media is not a preferred platform for donating. In our 2012 study, fewer than 10% of respondents said they had used Facebook to make donations to nonprofits. In our most recent study, an overwhelming majority of Millennials have given or want to give online via an organization's website; in-person giving was the second most preferred method of giving. The study affirmed that today's Millennials use websites and search engines primarily to gather information, find volunteer opportunities, and make financial gifts. They rely on social media and email for communicating and connecting with their networks. We see that mobile technology continues to grow in importance for this generation, as it gives them instant access to all their preferred channels.

# WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN TO YOU?

## HOW COMPANIES AND ORGANIZATIONS CAN USE THIS DATA TO INFORM THEIR DECISIONS

Consider these four takeaways for better engaging with Millennials:

**The question organizations must answer is how to inspire Millennials to work through and with the cause, rather than for the organization.**

In four years of research, we've seen that Millennials prefer to be involved in sporadic cause work rather than committed volunteer actions sponsored by an organization. Millennials also constantly challenge an organization's relevance. Millennials know they can do beneficial things for causes, issues, and people without actually working with an organization.

**From a communications standpoint, the study proves the need to invest time and resources into helping a Millennial feel and experience the cause.**

Investments by organizations in photography, video, digital storytelling, experiential learning, and other visuals are worthwhile if they inspire a Millennial to feel the need of the individual seeking assistance.

**It's up to the cause to equip Millennials with resources (video, information, statistics) to help them spread the word.**

Through their engagement with causes, Millennials collectively have taken on the role of digital marketers for issues. Unlike with previous generations, tools such as social media and peer fundraising put cause marketing in the hands of their constituents. Because Millennials are aggressively taking on this unofficial marketing role, they are creating what can best be observed as grassroots movements.

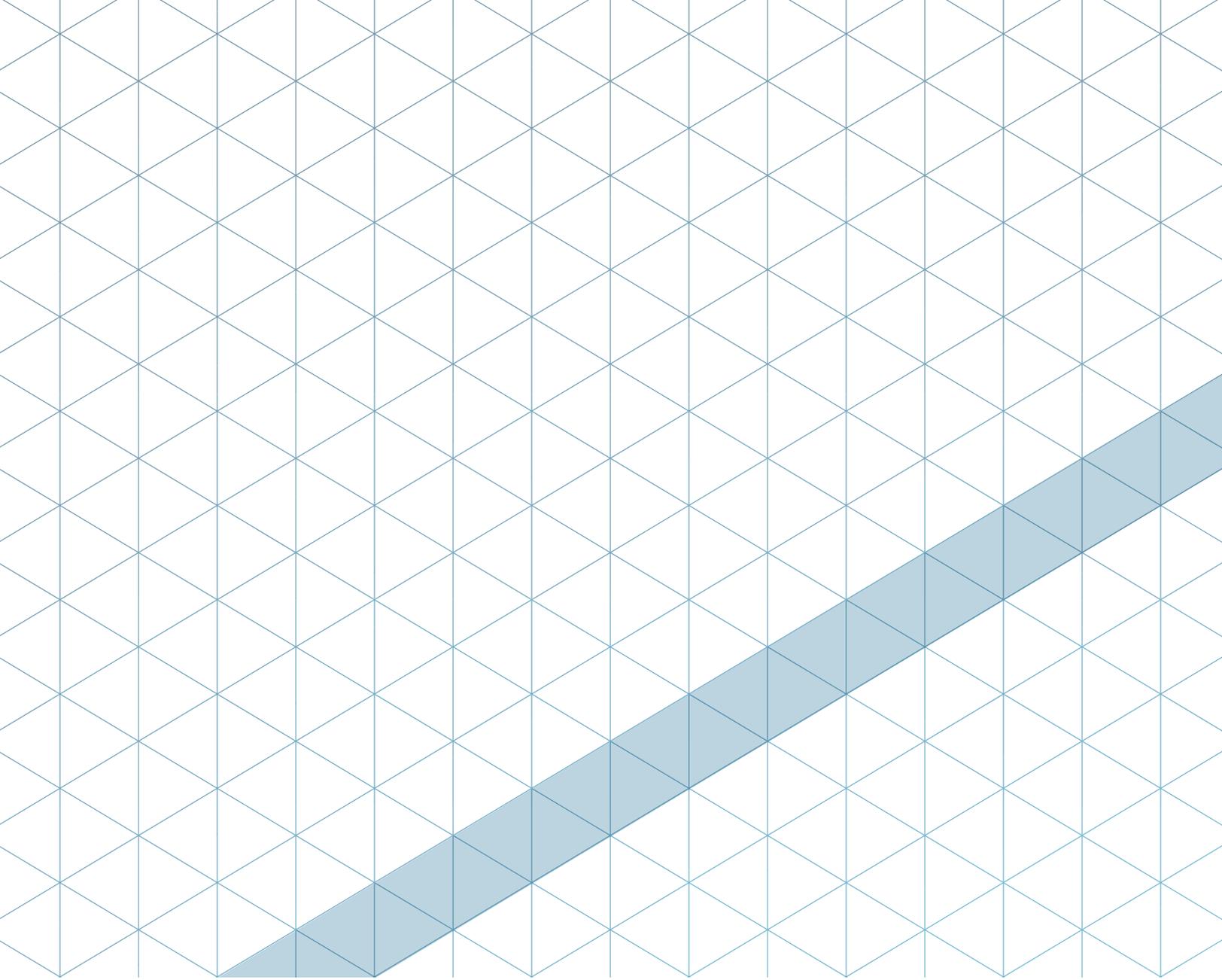
**Millennial preferences are becoming more than just preferences. They're becoming the norm.**

These do-gooders are influencing how organizations communicate to all audiences. We're at the point where marketing and messaging will lend themselves more to the Millennial style of communication. And organizations no longer can afford to cater only to older donors and volunteers. Today, younger audiences demand that the nonprofits they support evolve and show true change in the issues they address.

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The last four years of research have shown us a generation that is actively transforming our world and creating positive change in the process. We hope these insights can help your organization work with Millennials to unleash this force for good.

To learn more about the Millennial Impact Study, visit: [www.themillennialimpact.com](http://www.themillennialimpact.com)



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