

Engaging with our Future: Connect with Prosperous Millennials on their Terms

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I imagine you are already tired of the COVID-response pieces suggesting ways to move past the effects of the pandemic. This is not just another post-COVID suggestion. What it does offer is a new way of thinking. Would you prefer to return to the status quo of 2019—or would you rather embrace the experience and learning of 2020 to build and grow? If it’s the latter, read on.

A report published by the Beacon Collaborative in the UK *Young Givers: The Giving Needs of the Future Wealthy*¹ makes for compelling reading. It gives voice to the experience of young and wealthy millennials who are already giving. It spells out what they are looking for, what they experience and what they need as they make philanthropic investments. This research provides insight into:

- the relationships millennials want with charities
- how charitable organizations can connect with these millennials
- how millennials currently give
- millennial attitudes to philanthropy
- how millennial givers self-identify

¹ *UK Young Givers: The Giving Needs of the Future Wealthy*, Beacon Collaborative, April 2021.
<https://www.beaconcollaborative.org.uk/report-young-givers-the-giving-needs-of-the-future-wealthy>

Like many of my fellow boomers, I've made assumptions about this group called millennials. What this research shows, not surprisingly, is that my assumptions were wrong. I thought the way to engage this younger generation was to show impact, to offer responsibility in the traditional way—like with seats on the board—and with solicitation we see as appropriate for their level of wealth. This research proves otherwise.

Listening to the voices throughout the report, it's apparent that what's important to them is the *experience* of engaging—through community, through activity and through impact—and through individuals rather than through causes.

Millennials don't expect systemic change at this stage of their lives. They don't see themselves as "major" donors and most don't yet understand the true value of their time. Often, they speak a different language from the organizations they support, creating opportunities for misunderstanding. They should be approached in a way they prefer and can understand...not in a way we as organizations feel is proper.

The short story within this research is that the up-and-coming generation is learning, and so must we. Consider this: You may have, or had, kids in middle school. I did, still within living memory. Our girls were given the tools for success in middle school—grammar, spelling, mathematical and scientific principles. If they had not grasped those elements at that point in their lives, they likely would have sunk as they moved higher up the educational chain.

It's not being simplistic to use this as an analogy with donors. Without relatable understanding, experience and tools, these younger individuals may never become the major donors of our future. If we engage with them using their terms and building on their experiences; if we avoid putting them off by offering inappropriate opportunities or by expecting them to fit our templates, we can create real and valuable opportunities for the future.

It's not just valuable to invest the time in young givers now, it's essential. The Beacon Collaborative report tables ten key findings and offers ten solutions. Of all of them, the one I find most compelling is this:

Giving by wealthy millennials is not structured and is more ad hoc. They don't typically have time to create that structure and it feels like hard work. They connect with charities in three settings: through work, through lifestyle activities and if they face a major life event.

It's not difficult to see the opportunities the findings within [this report](#) present. Simple and timely building blocks, based on individuals' preferences, will help to bring the future generation of major donors to the forefront.

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