



WHITE PAPER

Donor Engagement in the Digital Age



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“Everything is digital nowadays. Technology is evolving so fast. How does fundraising keep up?”

The question on everyone’s minds. Countless webinars promise that AI will revolutionize fundraising, insist that annual giving is trending away from direct mail, declaring that everyone is chronically online. It is a question we ask ourselves every day and we are here to tell you the answer:

Fundraising hasn’t changed all that much.

The donor landscape will reflect the great wealth transfer between generations; engagement tactics may shift as we meet donors online; and our approach to cultivating generosity needs to evolve alongside a diversifying donor base.

But philanthropy at its core remains unchanged: get to know your donors, understand their motivations, and offer them opportunities to make a meaningful difference. Digital donor engagement will only enhance this work but not replace it. Remember, digital strategy is only as effective as our understanding of donors. With fewer Americans giving and a massive wealth transfer underway, it is more important than ever to recognize how different people connect with philanthropy. Here’s what we know.



Understanding Today's Donors: Generosity Transcends Demographics

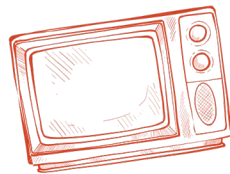
People of the same generation or with similar backgrounds do not move as one. There is great diversity of thought, behaviors, motivation, and values within groups. The following is focused on trends—rooted in research—that may or may not apply to individuals.

One trend that transcends generations: fewer Americans are giving to charitable organizations. With the exception of Baby Boomers, born between 1946-1964, who give the most money to charities due to their wealth, large population size, and life stage, each generation has seen a decline in the number of donors since 2013.¹ While total philanthropic dollars continue to grow year after year, the number of donors is shrinking, reflecting the overall concentration of wealth in fewer hands. Donor retention is more critical than ever; embracing donors at all levels and across all generations will be essential for sustainable fundraising.

We are in the middle of the great wealth transfer. Nearly \$100 trillion in assets are expected to transfer from Baby Boomers to their heirs through the year 2048.² Inevitably, we will see this reflected in the philanthropic landscape and organizations. Each generation of donors brings their own perspectives and values; they engage with philanthropy and nonprofits differently. Understanding these trends will make us better relationship builders.

Baby Boomers 1946-1964

Still a dominant force in philanthropy and **account for the most giving**. Prefer direct communication, personal relationships, and traditional giving methods. Engage with nonprofits through board service, volunteer work, and planned giving initiatives, making long-term stewardship critical.³



Millennials 1981-1996

Prioritize **social issues over institutions** and prefer to support direct service organizations. Expect organizations to have a strong online presence and compelling storytelling. Tend to support causes through peer-to-peer giving, subscription-based donations, and advocacy campaigns.⁴



Generation X 1965-1980

Often overlooked and **entering their peak years**. Driving force behind most philanthropic dollars. Prefer a balance of traditional engagement (direct mail, events, etc) and digital communication (social media, email, etc).³



Generation Z 1997-2012

Youngest generation of donors and true **"digital natives"** who maintain a much more global perspective with a deep commitment to social justice and the environment. As the most online generation, their interest in causes is often sparked by the stories and calls-to-action seen on social media.⁵



1. The Next Generation of American Giving: The Charitable Habits of Generation Z, Millennials, Generation X, Baby Boomers, and Matures, a publication of the Blackbaud Institute, 2018.
 2. Horton, C., U.S. High-Net-Worth and Ultra-High-Net-Worth Markets 2024, from <https://cerulli.com/reports/us-high-net-worth-and-ultra-high-net-worth-markets-2024>
 3. The Next Generation of American Giving: The Charitable Habits of Generation Z, Millennials, Generation X, Baby Boomers, and Matures, a publication of the Blackbaud Institute, 2018.
 4. The Millennial Impact Report: Understanding How Millennials Engage With Causes And Social Issues; Insights From 10 Years of Research Working In Partnership With Young Americans On Causes Today And In The Future, Researched By Achieve And Supported By The Case Foundation, 2018
 5. Gen Z at the Table: A Special Edition of the Next Generation of Giving, The Charitable Habits of Gen Z with Insights from Donors, Advocates, and Professional Fundraisers, a publication of the Blackbaud Institute, 2024.



Charitable giving trends vary within different ethnic groups. Generosity is deeply embedded in cultural traditions, and it is the common thread within our communities. There is a clear commitment to supporting issues, communities, and individuals within our diversifying donor base; understanding more about patterns within donor constituencies will help foster deeper engagement.

Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Philanthropy

For nearly 20 years, Asian Americans are the fastest-growing ethnic group in the United States, and yet funding to AAPI communities has historically been neglected by foundations and institutional donors. In response to recent events, like the "Stop Asian Hate" movement and wildfire disasters in Hawaii, there has been increased advocacy and mobilization within the AAPI communities.

AAPI donors are generating more philanthropic activity by utilizing both family foundations and donor-advised funds as giving vehicles. Major community foundations, such as the Chicago Community Trust and the Denver Foundation, have noticed a rise in AAPI-affiliated giving circles and tapped into the thriving culture of generosity and issue-driven philanthropy within the communities.⁶



Black Philanthropy

Black philanthropy is a long-standing tradition rooted in community care, mutual aid, and faith-based giving. Two-thirds of households donate to organizations and charities, contributing to an estimated \$11 billion annually. On average, Black donors give 25% more of their income to charities compared to white households.⁷

Faith is a strong motivator for giving back, with 64% of Black donors citing religious beliefs as a key driver for their philanthropy.⁸ Churches play a foundational role in Black philanthropy, fostering giving and community investment. In addition to financial contributions, Black communities emphasize service through volunteering and advocacy. In spite of a vibrant philanthropic culture, these donors remain under-engaged when it comes to giving to nonprofit organizations. Research shows that one in five Black donors would support more organizations if they were asked more often.⁹

6. Trends in Philanthropy for 2024: AAPI Communities are Leading an Upswell in Philanthropy, researched by Trish Abalo and Mandy Sharp Eizinger from the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy, 2024

7. African American Philanthropy: A Culture of Generosity, Giving With Impact Podcast featuring Tyrone Freeman, Stasia Washington & Michael Voss, 2020

8. What Fundraisers Should Know About Black Philanthropy by Christal Cherry, greaterpublic.org

9. Drinks, M. The Race to Philanthropy 2024, from <https://bloomerang.co/blog/the-race-to-philanthropy/>



Latinx Philanthropy

Latinos are the largest ethnic group in the United States and a growing economic force, yet their participation in traditional charitable giving has declined. Latinx household giving rates dropped from 44% in 2000 to 26% in 2018. While income disparities and generational wealth explain part of the decline, other significant factors include a lack of trust in institutions and cultural differences in giving.

Latinos engage heavily in informal giving—providing direct financial assistance to family, friends, and their community. Giving in Latinx communities tends to be more horizontal. They prioritize supporting family and local needs before making charitable donations to traditional organizations. Even when controlling for other factors (education, age, income, etc.), informal giving remains a defining characteristic of Latinx philanthropy.

Despite the decline in formal giving, Latinos remain highly motivated to give. Their top motivations include personal responsibility, religious beliefs, and a connection to someone representing a trusted cause. Latino families are more likely to engage younger generations in giving back and philanthropy. Still, research indicates that a key barrier to Latinx philanthropy is that many Latinos are not being asked to give by traditional institutions.

Understanding and adapting to these cultural nuances will help nonprofits build stronger relationships with diverse donors and create more inclusive fundraising strategies.¹⁰



Translating Trends: Content Strategy for Digital Donor Engagement

At its core, fundraising is about relationships. The most effective fundraisers understand that building trust, engaging donors with compelling stories, and providing clear avenues for support are essential to long-term success. While technology can facilitate these connections, it cannot replace face-to-face engagement. Your digital efforts should align with the fundamental principles of donor cultivation: listening, engaging, and inspiring.

Storytelling is one of the most effective ways to inspire action. We have many platforms and vehicles at our fingertips in this digital age and leveraging them to share informative and resonant content will help you connect with donors.

Tell people or community-centered stories that illustrate how your mission makes a difference in everyday lives. Research shows that Black and Latinx donors are motivated by a sense of personal responsibility and opportunity for community investment. Millennials and Generation Z seek out organizations that directly serve populations. Highlighting individual impact stories strengthens emotional ties and resonates with these donors' deeply rooted values of collective generosity.

10. Understanding Generosity Trends Across Latinx Communities in the U.S., researched and published by Lilly Family School of Philanthropy and Hispanics in Philanthropy, 2023.



Connect your organization's mission to the values of your donors and why it matters. Digital storytelling should align with the motivations of your target audience, whether they prioritize human services, social justice, environmental sustainability, or healthcare. Clearly articulating how giving to your organization is a manifestation of their values as individuals will drive long-term engagement.

Appeal to different generations of donors across social media platforms. Generations interact with social media in different ways: Baby Boomers, born between 1946-1964, and Generation X, born between 1965-1980, are most active on Facebook; Millennials, born between 1981-1996, are more known to be on Instagram, and Generation Z, born between 1997-2012, prefers TikTok. If your organization wants to engage a younger demographic of donors, invest in creating short-form videos or reels for TikTok instead of a paid campaign on Facebook. If your priority is to grow your legacy giving, then leveraging Facebook or Instagram makes more sense. Know your audience and align your content strategy accordingly.

Use data visualization and infographics to tell a story with numbers. Donors across generations expect organizations to communicate outcomes, maintain transparency, and be accountable to their goals. Offering data and progress reports about your programs, impact, and use of donations will enhance your organization's credibility and trust from donors.

Research shows that one in five Black donors would give more if asked frequently. Latino donors are more likely to support a cause when asked by someone they respect, and Millennials and Generation Z are particularly influenced by their peers when choosing where to donate. Inviting your current supporters to share personal stories, fundraising campaigns, and testimonials on social media amplifies reach and builds trust across diverse donor bases.

Integrating peer influence into digital fundraising can strengthen donor retention and expand your donor community; organizations that invest in peer-to-peer fundraising are investing in the health of their donor pipeline.

Segmentation and Donor Personas

Segmenting your donors based on their behavior, preferences, or values will make your donor communication more meaningful, relevant, and effective. **Donor personas—semi-fictional profiles based on research and data**—are an excellent tool to capture the common donor types within your community and provide insight into their motivations and behaviors. Donor personas will not replace relational fundraising. Rather, they are an effective tool to broadly understand the characteristics of your supporter base, refine messaging, and guide digital communication strategy.

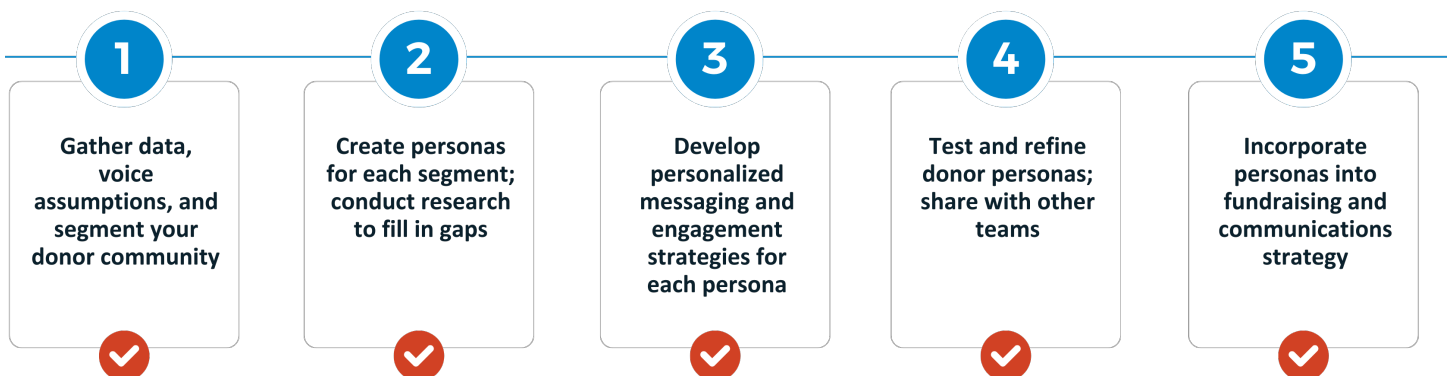




Key Elements of a Donor Persona



How to Create a Donor Persona





Utilizing Digital Tools to Talk to Your Donors

Direct engagement through digital platforms fosters connection and allows nonprofit organizations to better understand donor motivations. Leveraging data insights from social media interactions, website behavior, and survey responses can inform fundraising strategies. Don't hesitate to engage donors in two-way conversations—asking about their interests, values, and priorities—to create meaningful interactions that drive deeper support.

Your “Go-To” List of Questions for Donor Engagement

- What causes are you most passionate about, and why? What social or community issues are most important to you?
- Are you involved with any other organizations? What is your personal connection to our mission?
- What first attracted you to our organization? Was it a specific program or experience?
- Have you attended an event or program? What was your experience like?
- How do you feel about the work we've done so far? Is there a specific initiative that stands out to you?
- How would you like to stay connected with us? Do you prefer regular updates, personal invitations to events, or hands-on involvement?
- Are there any areas of our work that you would like to learn more about or get involved in?
- How do you prioritize your philanthropic giving? What influences your decision?
- What are you trying to accomplish with your generosity? How do you prefer to see the impact?
- What inspires you most to support a cause or take action?
- Are there other nonprofits you support? If so, what do you appreciate most about their approach engaging the community?

The Power of Relationships in a Digital Fundraising Era

Even as the donor landscape continues to evolve, one thing remains clear: successful fundraising is built on strong relationships. Digital strategies will enhance donor engagement when they are rooted in trust, understanding, and personalized outreach.

Generational shifts, a diversifying donor base, and the increasing concentration of wealth are reshaping giving trends, but generosity transcends demographics. By aligning digital engagement with donor values and behaviors, you can cultivate a group of committed supporters who will support your mission for years to come.

The tools of fundraising may change; the fundamentals—listening, engaging, and inspiring—will always be at the heart of philanthropy.

Campbell & Company's Digital Donor Engagement services equip your team with an innovative digital strategy for donor communications, engagement, and relationship management. For more information, contact Campbell & Company at [877.957.0000](tel:877.957.0000) or dde@campbellcompany.com to accelerate your engagement efforts today.



Christina Knaier
Vice President, Communications

In every engagement, Christina uses passion and know-how to bring each client's mission to life. She knows from experience that the right message can create powerful connections—between donors and an organization, fundraisers and volunteers, creativity and strategy. Through these connections, remarkable impact is possible.

Prior to Campbell & Company, Christina worked in higher education for several years and served as Assistant Director of the Gen-1 Theme House at University of Cincinnati (UC), a living-learning community that serves first-generation, low-income college students. She also taught as an adjunct professor with UC's Department of English and Comparative Literature. As the leader of Campbell & Company's message coaching and training practice, Christina leverages her teaching expertise to support her clients and the firm.

Christina graduated magna cum laude with a Bachelor of Arts in English and Gender & Diversity Studies from Xavier University, and summa cum laude with a Master of Arts in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies from University of Cincinnati.



Adriana Lopez
Senior Consultant, Fundraising

Adriana joins Campbell & Company with an extensive background in individual giving, relationship building, development communications, campaign strategy, and project management. During her time as a frontline fundraiser, Adriana had a proven track record of generating revenue and exceeding goals. According to Adriana, fundraising is the perfect mix of both art and science. She brings this passion, perspective, tangible experience, and innovation to every client.

Throughout her fundraising career, Adriana managed development and communications activities for multiple revenue streams, including annual giving and major gifts. Most recently, Adriana was Development Director at The Representation Project, where she led all development initiatives and spearheaded the organization's first virtual fundraising event. As the Individual Giving Manager at Girl Scouts of Greater Los Angeles, she oversaw all annual giving campaigns, launched peer fundraising and monthly giving programs, and collaborated on special events and capital campaigns. While at Scripps College, Adriana was an integral member of the institutional advancement department during the College's 175M comprehensive campaign.



Campbell & Company is an employee-owned national consulting firm that helps mission-driven organizations create greater impact through fundraising consulting, communications, strategic information services, and executive search. Since 1976, Campbell & Company has helped over 2,500 clients grow their fundraising results through an integrated approach. In addition, our award-winning executive search team brings a record of success in placing exceptional leaders across the nonprofit sector.

Underlying all our work is a shared focus on the Campbell & Company mission: to advance the life-changing work of mission-driven organizations, and our dedication to collaborating with nonprofits invested in inclusive philanthropy to impact lives and move the nonprofit sector toward greater justice.

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