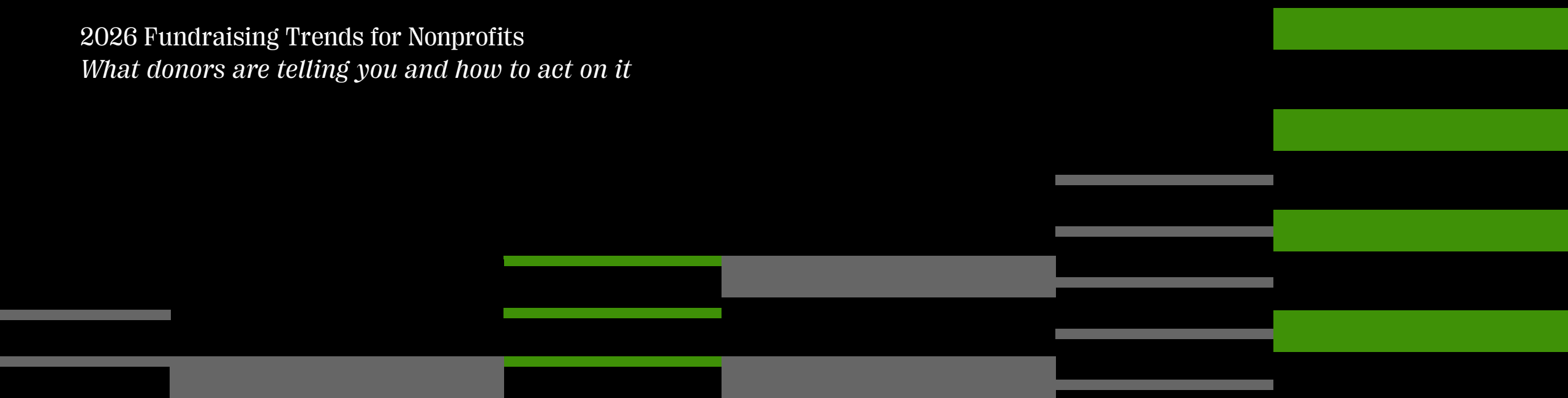


# *The Giving* **SIGNALS** *Report*

2026 Fundraising Trends for Nonprofits

*What donors are telling you and how to act on it*



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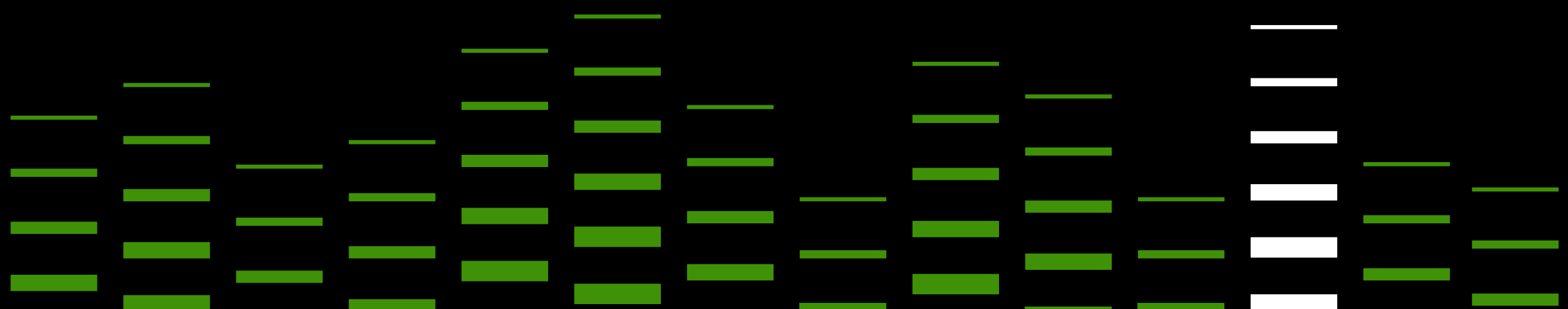
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*Introduction and Overview:*  
See What's Changing.  
Shape What's **NEXT.**




**THE 2026 GIVING SIGNALS REPORT IS A SNAPSHOT OF HOW DONOR EXPECTATIONS ARE EVOLVING – AND HOW YOU CAN READ THE SIGNALS, RESPOND WITH CONFIDENCE, AND MOVE MORE GENEROSITY INTO ACTION.**

# Introduction and Overview


Generosity isn't fading. Trust isn't eroding. Donors are offering clear signals about what earns a "yes" – and where the giving experience falls short.

The headlines have told a tighter story for months – donations declining, trust fraying, budgets bracing. But when we asked more than 1,000 donors and 400 fundraisers what's actually happening, a different picture came through.

Donors still trust the nonprofits they support. They still care deeply about the communities and causes that reflect their values. And they're still giving. For most, generosity isn't a transaction. It's an expression of who they are and the future they want to help build.



**WHAT'S CHANGED ISN'T THE IMPULSE TO GIVE. IT'S THE WAY DONORS ARE SIGNALING WHAT MAKES THEM SAY YES.**





## **THE OPPORTUNITY**

## **TO LISTEN MORE CLOSELY THAN EVER.**

They want to know exactly where their money goes. They want proof that their gift mattered. They want the giving path to feel familiar and free of friction. And they're sending nonprofits the clearest scorecard we've seen in years on how to meet them there.

That's good news. The opportunity isn't to fight a generosity decline. It's to listen more closely than ever.

This report is your field guide to what donors are saying right now – what motivates them, what gets in their way, and where their expectations are running ahead of where nonprofits are aimed. The signals are there. The question is whether we're tuned in.

# Methodology

The research was conducted online in the U.S. by The Harris Poll on behalf of Bloomerang among (1) 1,003 adults aged 18+ who live in the U.S. and donated to a charity/nonprofit in the past 12 months (Donors) and (2) 405 adults aged 18+ who live in the U.S. and work for a nonprofit with decision-making responsibility regarding fundraising (Fundraising Decision Makers). The survey was conducted between March 13–24, 2026.

Data for Donors is weighted where necessary by age, gender, race/ethnicity, region, education, marital status, household size, household income, employment status, to bring it in line with their actual proportions in the population. Data for Fundraising Decision Makers is not weighted and therefore only representative of the individuals who completed the survey.

**1,000+ DONORS**  
**400+ FUNDRAISERS**  
**SURVEYED**



Statistical significance testing was conducted at the 95% level of confidence. All comparative claims in this report are statistically significant unless otherwise noted. Due to space limitations, not every significant difference among groups is displayed.

Additional results based on small samples ( $n < 100$ ) are too small to report quantitatively and, where referenced in this report, should be interpreted as directional only. By directional, we mean that there are differences in the results, but they are not statistically significant. These are noted as a footnote: “\*Caution, small base  $< 100$ , results are directional in nature.” This caveat is most relevant with regard to findings relating to Gen Z.

**A note on Gen Z:** Gen Z respondents (ages 18–29) were less than half as likely as any other generation to report having donated money to a charity or nonprofit in the past year, and as such they were screened out of our survey at a higher rate than respondents representing other generations. While some Gen Z findings are included in this report, the low sample size of active Gen Z donors ( $n = 41$ ) means

that Gen Z data gathered by this survey does not reflect statistically significant differences from other generations, and as such all statements regarding Gen Z should be interpreted as directional in nature.

# Executive Summary: What nonprofits need to know

**This year's findings send a strong set of giving signals for nonprofit teams**

## **MOTIVATED BY MEANING**

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Donors are motivated by meaning. Along with passion for specific issues, donors report that caring about their community, wanting to make a difference, caring about the future, and seeing giving as part of their identity all rank among the strongest motivators to give. This is a values-driven donor landscape, not simply a transactional one.

## **BELONGING MATTERS**

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Belonging matters, especially for younger donors. Millennials are more likely than older generations to say they are motivated by feeling part of something. That matters for retention, and it matters as much if not more for acquisition. A sense of shared purpose can help secure both a first gift and a meaningful connection.

## **PROOF STILL MATTERS**

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Donor trust in nonprofits isn't eroding, but proof still matters. Donors broadly trust nonprofits and recognize the importance of the work nonprofits do. They also want visible evidence of effectiveness. Transparency is the top signal donors use to judge whether a nonprofit is effective.

## **CONVENIENCE**

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Convenience shapes conversion. Email remains the leading communication channel overall, while preferences beyond email differ by generation.

## DONORS RECONSIDER GIVING

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Unexpected fees, and fees framed as tips, will make donors reconsider giving. A donor ready to give – regardless of age – can be stopped by a surprise at checkout, especially when fees aren't clearly explained upfront. Tips introduce a different kind of friction: a separate ask from the platform, not the nonprofit, that can disrupt the moment and pull attention away from the gift.

## POTENTIAL GAPS

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Most of the potential gaps between donors and nonprofits are tactical rather than fundamental. Donors generally trust the nonprofits they support and report high satisfaction with the way organizations thank them, communicate with them, and demonstrate impact. The bigger opportunities show up in channel mix, message emphasis, and friction in the giving process.

## MILLENNIALS

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Millennials are a driving force in fundraising. Millennials are more likely than older generations to say they plan to increase their giving and support new organizations. They also show stronger responsiveness to belonging, reviews, matching campaigns, personalization, and impact cues.

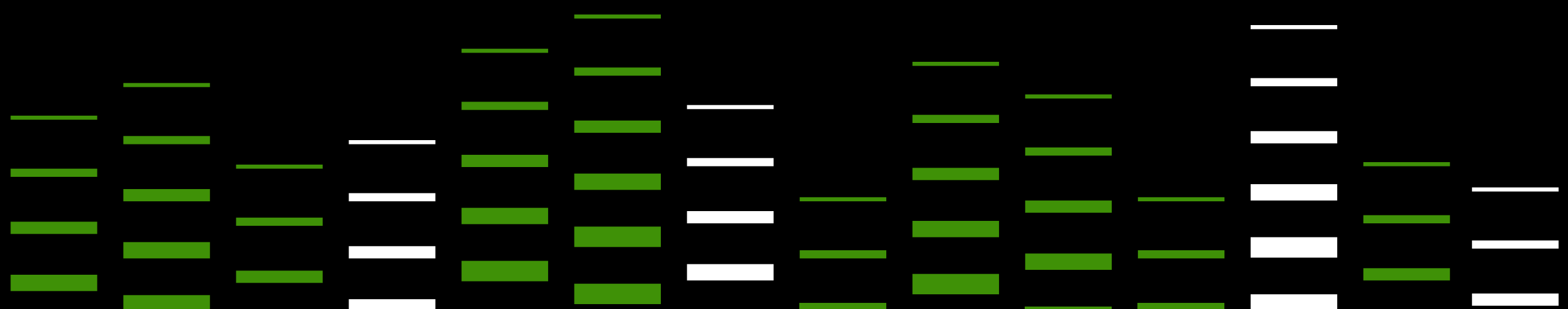
## FOR NONPROFITS, THIS IS GOOD NEWS.

The opportunity is to follow the signals donors are already sending and turn them into smarter outreach, stronger relationships, and next-level impact.



# *The Giving Signals:*

What **DONORS** are telling nonprofits now.



# Why Donors Give

## Meaning, identity, and the desire to make a difference

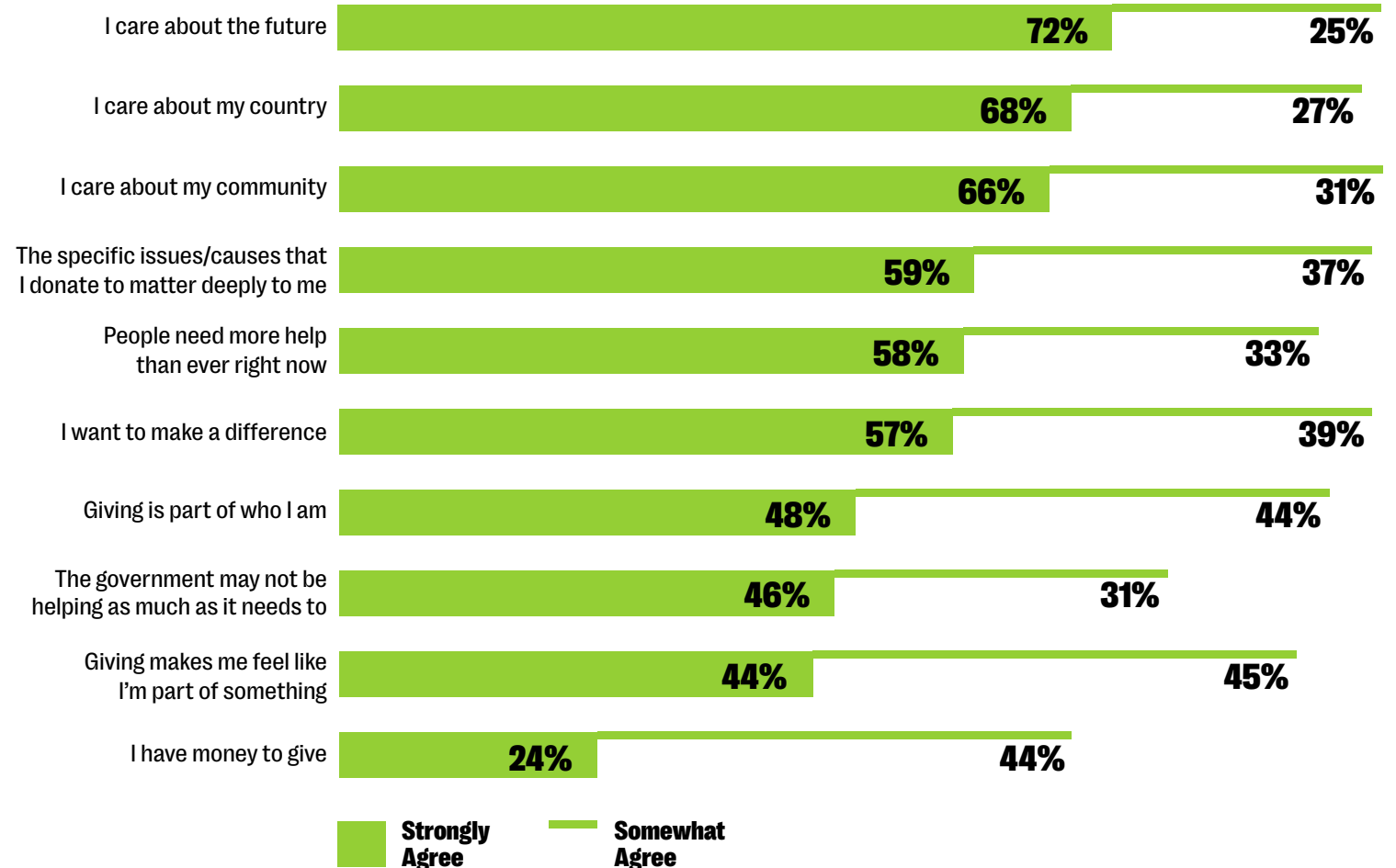
**The first giving signal is deeply human:** donors are motivated less by transaction and more by meaning, identity, and the desire to make a difference. They care about the future. They care about helping others in a moment when many feel that needs are rising. These motivations far outweigh more purely practical drivers.

While 97% of donors say caring about their communities motivates them to give, 96% say wanting to make a difference does, 96% say caring about the future does, and 92% say giving is part of who they are. Just 68% say “having money to give” is a motivator.

That matters because it reminds nonprofits that giving is not primarily a rational decision; It is a values-led act shaped by identity, purpose, and belief in what is possible.

### Motivators for Donating

*Considering all of the donations to charities or nonprofits I've made in the past year or are planning to make in the coming year, I am motivated to give because...*



Base size: n=1,003

**GIVING IS NOT PRIMARILY  
A RATIONAL DECISION;  
IT IS A VALUES-LED ACT  
SHAPED BY IDENTITY,  
PURPOSE, AND BELIEF  
IN WHAT IS POSSIBLE.**

This signal is especially strong when looking at younger donors:

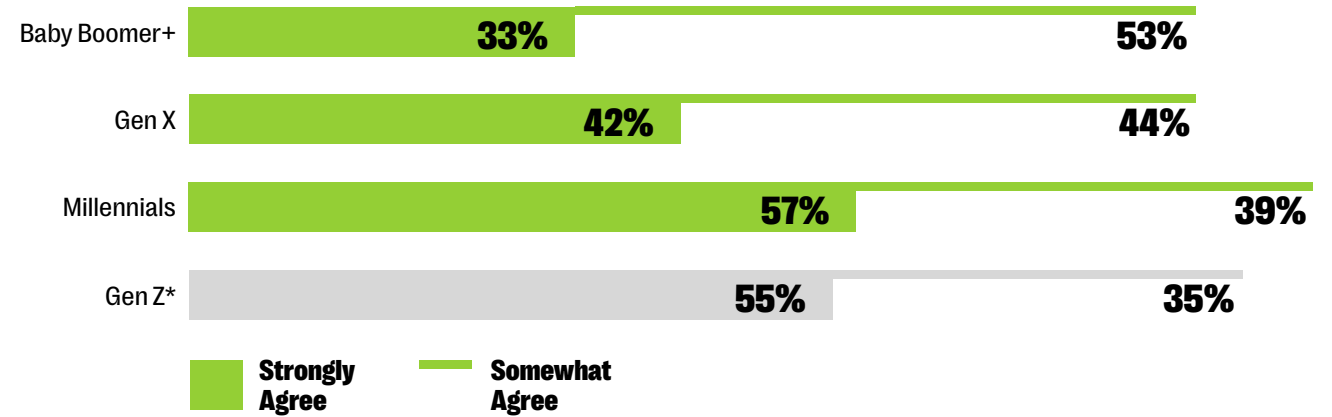
- Millennials (97%) are more likely than Gen X (86%) and Baby Boomers+ (87%) to say they give because it makes them feel like they are “part of something.” Gen Z (90%)<sup>1</sup> are directionally on par with Gen X and Baby Boomers+.
- The gaps between Millennials and older generations are even more pronounced when looking only at “strongly agree” responses (57% for Millennials; 55% for Gen Z;<sup>2</sup> 42% for Gen X; 33% for Baby Boomers+), which suggests that belonging is not a mild preference. For many younger donors, it is a powerful emotional driver.
- Millennials (94%) and Gen Z (92%)<sup>3</sup> were also more likely than Gen X (82%) and Baby Boomers+ (83%) to agree with the statement “I’m motivated to donate to a charity or nonprofit when that organization makes me feel like I’m part of something (I’m not alone and others care about the issue I care about).”

Millennials (and directionally Gen Z<sup>4</sup>) are also more likely than older generations to strongly agree that they give because they care about the future and because they believe people need more help than ever right now.

<sup>1,2,3,4</sup> Caution, small base <100, results are directional in nature.

### Giving and Belonging

*I am motivated to give because giving makes me feel like I’m part of something.*



Gen Z: n=41, Millennials: n=280, Gen X: n=315, Baby Boomer+ n=367

\*Caution: Gen Z data reflects a small base <100; results are directional in nature.

**TOGETHER, THOSE FINDINGS SUGGEST YOUNGER DONORS OFTEN APPROACH GENEROSITY THROUGH A FRAMEWORK THAT EMPHASIZES IDENTITY, AGENCY, URGENCY, AND SHARED PURPOSE.**

The report also points to an important opportunity around first-time giving. For Millennials especially, a fundraising organization that “makes me feel like I’m part of something” was selected as a top-three motivator by 46% of respondents considering a first-time donation, compared with 28% considering a donation to an organization they had already supported. That suggests belonging can be a powerful acquisition signal.

Donors want to help, but they also want that help to feel meaningful. Younger generations in particular express a strong tendency to associate giving with a sense of making a difference and caring about the future.

**The opportunity:** A donation can feel like a quick exchange – a click, a confirmation, a receipt – but the strongest fundraising messages take that moment further by showing donors what their gift makes possible and where they belong in the story. Framing giving as participation in something meaningful helps supporters see their role in a shared outcome, and that sense of belonging is especially powerful for first-time donors, who are more motivated by feeling part of something than repeat donors.



## SHOW DONORS WHAT THEIR GIFT MAKES POSSIBLE AND WHERE THEY BELONG IN THE STORY



# Signal Response

## What to do next

Audit your top donor-facing appeals and ask yourself: does this copy speak to who the donor is, not just what they can do?

Build first-time donor messaging that recognizes a donor's first gift and creates a strong sense of belonging and positive anticipation of what comes next by warmly welcoming them into the donor family.

Write copy that shows the donors that you need them and not just their money. For example: "The next orphaned puppy needs you. Someone who loves them."

Position every piece of donor communications to enhance a donor's good feelings about themselves. Call out how what they've done to help others differentiates them as people and how it is filling the gap between the current problem and the vision of a better world.

Feature supporter participation in your storytelling with quotes, campaign counters, volunteer moments, or donor spotlights that show collective momentum.

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## BONUS MOVE

After thanking your new donors follow up with a quick 3 question donor survey asking them 1) multiple choice questions about program interest areas 2) what inspired their gift (fill in the blank) and 3) if there's anything you can do to improve their experience (fill in the blank)

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Instead of thanking donors for making a generous gift, tap into their identity on a deeper level by calling out their moral traits. Instead of thanking them for being generous or making a generous gift, thank them for who they are: a generous person, a helper, or a friend.

# What Makes Donors Say Yes

## How nonprofits can motivate donors to action

While the previous section focused on why donors feel inclined to give, this section looks at what moves them from intention to action. **The signal here is clarity.** Donors are more likely to act when they can clearly see where their money goes, what it will do, and why this organization is a smart place to give. The signals here show the following:

- Caring about a cause is essential, but it is not the sole motivator for giving
- Donors also want confidence that the organizations they support are aligned with their values
- Donors want to know that their gift has a clear purpose and that the results of giving will be visible

**The strongest organizational motivator by far is issue alignment.**

98% of donors say they are motivated to donate to organizations working on issues they care about.

**98%**

**After that, the biggest motivators are about clarity.**

94% of donors say they are motivated to give when an organization lets them know exactly where their money will go, and 90% say they are motivated when the organization tells them about the impact of their donation.

**94%**

**Clarity is a top motivator but most appeals don't deliver it. Here's a typical appeal – and a sharper version.**

**BEFORE:** Your gift today helps us continue our vital work serving families in need throughout the community. Every dollar makes a difference.

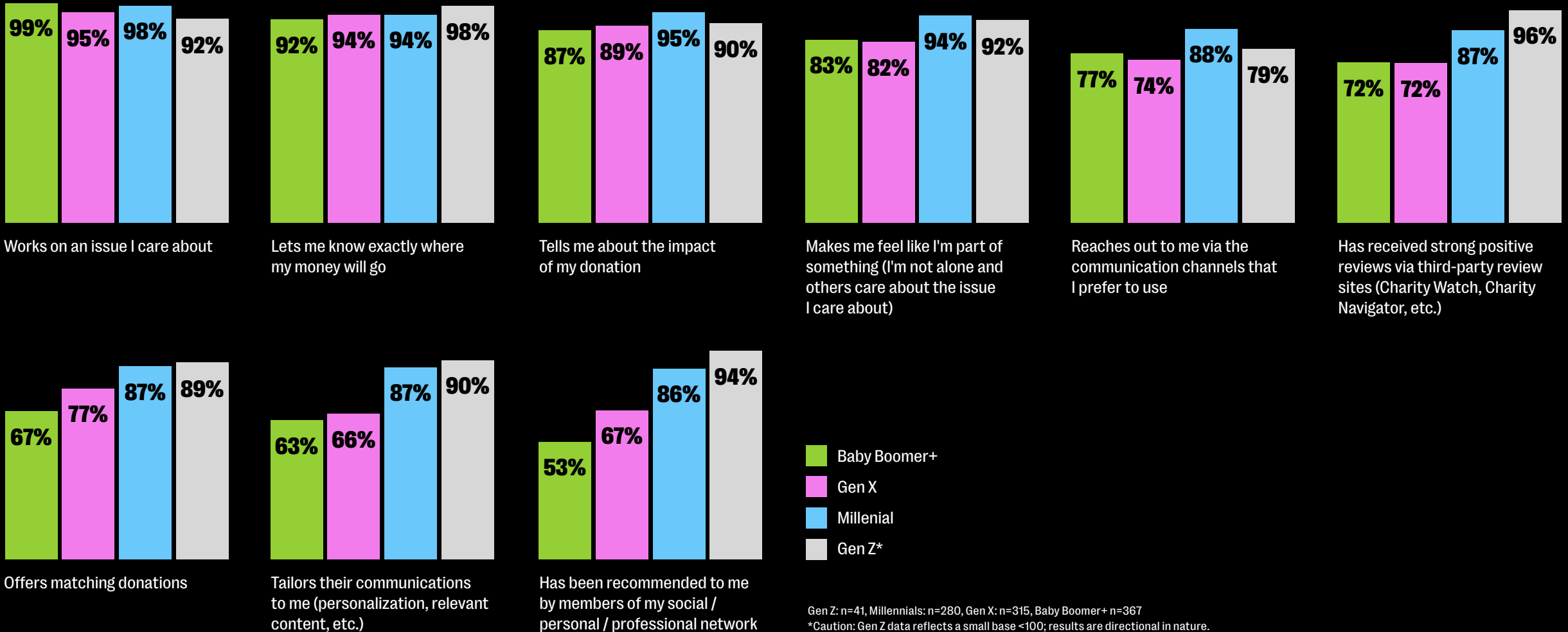
**AFTER:** \$50 buys a week of groceries for a family in our pantry program. \$200 keeps the lights on at our family resource center for a day. Where would you like your gift to go?

The before version says “we matter.” The after version says “here’s exactly what you’re doing.” Donors said they want the second one – by 88 percentage points (94% vs. 6%).

**88**  
PERCENTAGE  
POINTS

**Fundraiser Factors and Actions that Motivate**

*Considering all of the organizations to which I give, I'm motivated to donate to a charity or nonprofit when that organization...*



**THIS IS ONE OF THE CLEAREST  
GIVING SIGNALS IN THE REPORT.**

**DONORS DO NOT ONLY  
WANT TO SUPPORT A  
MISSION IN THE ABSTRACT.  
THEY WANT A CONCRETE  
LINE OF SIGHT BETWEEN  
THEIR GENEROSITY AND  
THE OUTCOME IT CAN  
HELP CREATE.**

Belonging also appears again here, but now at the organizational level. 87% say they are motivated by nonprofits that make them feel like they are part of something. This reinforces an important point: Belonging is not only something donors bring with them internally; it is also something organizations can actively create through the way they communicate, frame participation, and invite donors into the mission.

**87%**

**MOTIVATED BY  
NONPROFITS THAT  
MAKE THEM FEEL  
LIKE THEY ARE PART  
OF SOMETHING**

For younger donors, additional factors play a larger role in why they donate. Millennials and Gen Z<sup>1</sup> are more likely than older generations to be influenced by:

- Third-party reviews
- Recommendations from their social or professional network
- Matching campaigns
- Personalized communications
- Outreach through the channels they prefer.

<sup>1</sup>Caution, small base <100, results are directional in nature.

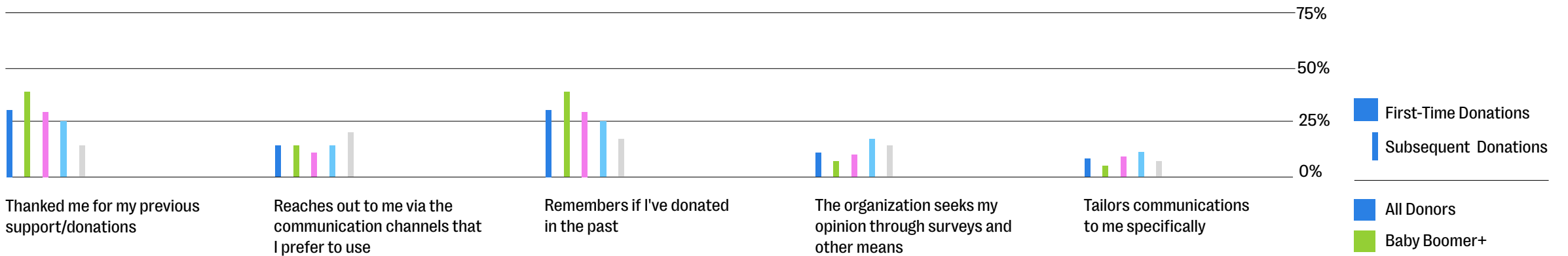
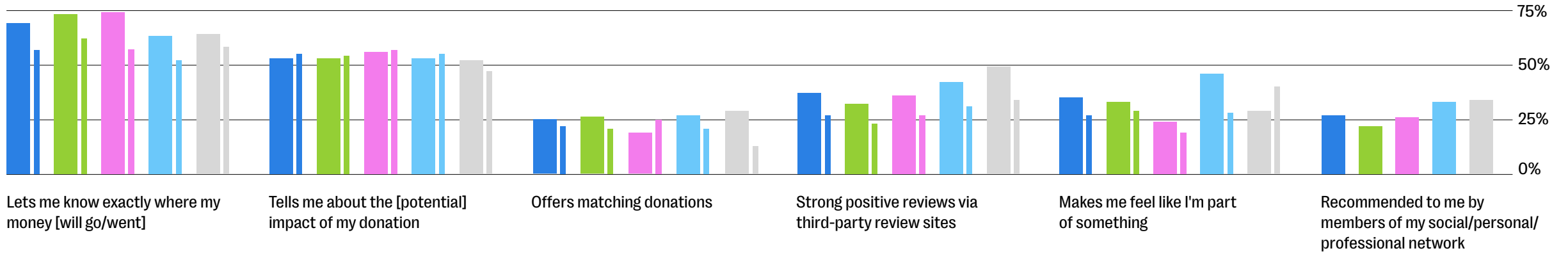
None of these factors outrank issue alignment, fund-use clarity, or impact, but they do appear to play a stronger supporting role for younger donors, especially when compared with Gen X and Baby Boomers+.

**The opportunity:** The implication for nonprofits is practical. The strongest fundraising asks will connect cause, clarity, and confidence. They will show donors the issue they care about, explain what the gift will do, and reinforce why giving to this organization is a smart, trusted choice.

### Factors Motivating Donations: First-Time vs. Returning Donors

*When deciding whether to make a donation to a charity or nonprofit organization for the very first time, which of the following factors are most important?*


*When deciding whether to donate again to a nonprofit you've supported in the past, which of the following factors are most important? Please select between 1-3 options.*




Gen Z: n=41, Millennials: n=280, Gen X: n=315, Baby Boomer+ n=367  
 \*Caution: Gen Z data reflects a small base <100; results are directional in nature.

# Signal Response


## What to do next




Rewrite campaign asks so the use of funds appear above the fold in email, direct mail, landing pages, and donation forms.




Pair every major appeal with one specific outcome example, such as meals served, students reached, acres restored, or calls answered.




Create a small proof library of donor reviews, testimonials, ratings, and media mentions that can be reused across campaigns.



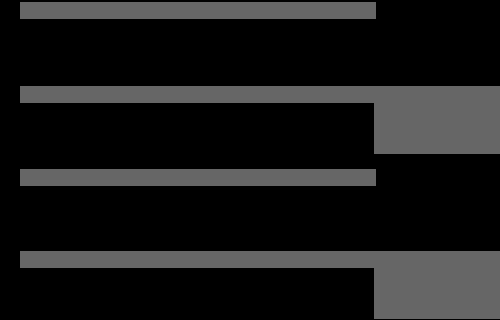
Test matching-gift language in appeals aimed at younger donors and measure lift in click-through and conversion rates.



Personalize appeals by donor interest area, prior giving behavior, or preferred program focus whenever your data supports it.



Review your first-gift ask and confirm that a new supporter can quickly understand three things: the issue, the use of funds, and the impact their gift can make.



# Signaling Effectiveness

## Trust in nonprofits is strong, but proof still matters

**Trust.** One of the most encouraging findings in this report is that donors' trust in nonprofits is already strong. 97% of all recent donors agree that the nonprofits they interact with seem aligned with what they care about, why they might want to donate, and how they might want to donate.

95% agree that they trust the nonprofit organizations they donate to use donor funds effectively. This extends beyond just organizations with which donors already interact, with almost four out of five donors (79%) agreeing that they “trust nonprofit organizations at large to use donor funds effectively.”

That finding cuts against the sector narrative. Most recent research on public trust surveys U.S. adults broadly – many of whom haven't donated in years, if ever. This report surveyed active donors: people who gave in the past 12 months. And among that group, trust in the organizations they support is not eroding. It's strong, consistent, and worth naming.

When asked about the organizations they support, donors report very positive experiences across a range of stewardship measures, including making giving easy, respecting communication preferences, thanking donors, demonstrating impact, and making donors feel valued, with agreement ranging from 93% to 98%.

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## SIGNAL TEST

To ensure you're making giving easy for your supporters, review your donation page on a phone. Start a timer. Can a brand-new visitor answer these three questions in 30 seconds?

### 01 WHAT DOES THIS NONPROFIT DO?

Plain language. No jargon.

### 02 WHERE DOES MY MONEY GO?

One sentence. No pdf download required.

### 03 HAS GIVING WORKED BEFORE?

One stat. One story of impact. That's it.

If a first-time donor can't answer all three in 30 seconds, you're losing gifts at the moment of highest intent.

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**DONOR TRUST IN  
NONPROFITS ISN'T  
ERODING. IT'S STRONG,  
CONSISTENT, AND  
WORTH NAMING.**

**The role of nonprofits.** Donors also recognize the important role nonprofits play in meeting needs when public funding declines. More than three in four donors (77%) agree they are motivated to give because the government may not be helping as much as it needs to.

At the same time, donors are broadly aligned on what nonprofits are here to do. 91% agree nonprofits have an important role to play in addressing needs created by reductions in government funding. Donors are not questioning whether nonprofits matter – they see them as essential.

This clarity creates a meaningful opportunity. Donors are already aware of the gap between rising community needs and available public support. What they need from nonprofits is direction: where the need is most urgent, what their gift will do, and how they can be part of the response. Organizations that connect the broader

challenge to specific, tangible outcomes can help donors move from awareness to action.

**Transparency.** Even though donors view nonprofits as essential in the response to public funding cuts, and do trust nonprofits, donors still want proof of effectiveness from the organizations they support. When asked what most clearly signals that a nonprofit is effective, the top answer is transparency. 69% select clear reporting on finances and programs as one of the strongest indicators of effectiveness. 58% select impact data and statistics, and 48% select beneficiary stories or testimonials.

In other words, donors want both evidence and meaning. They want to see measurable outcomes, and they want to understand those outcomes in human terms. Impact data and human stories work together as signals of trustworthiness.



**91% OF DONORS RECOGNIZE THAT NONPROFITS HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY IN CLOSING GAPS LEFT BY GOVERNMENT SPENDING REDUCTIONS.**



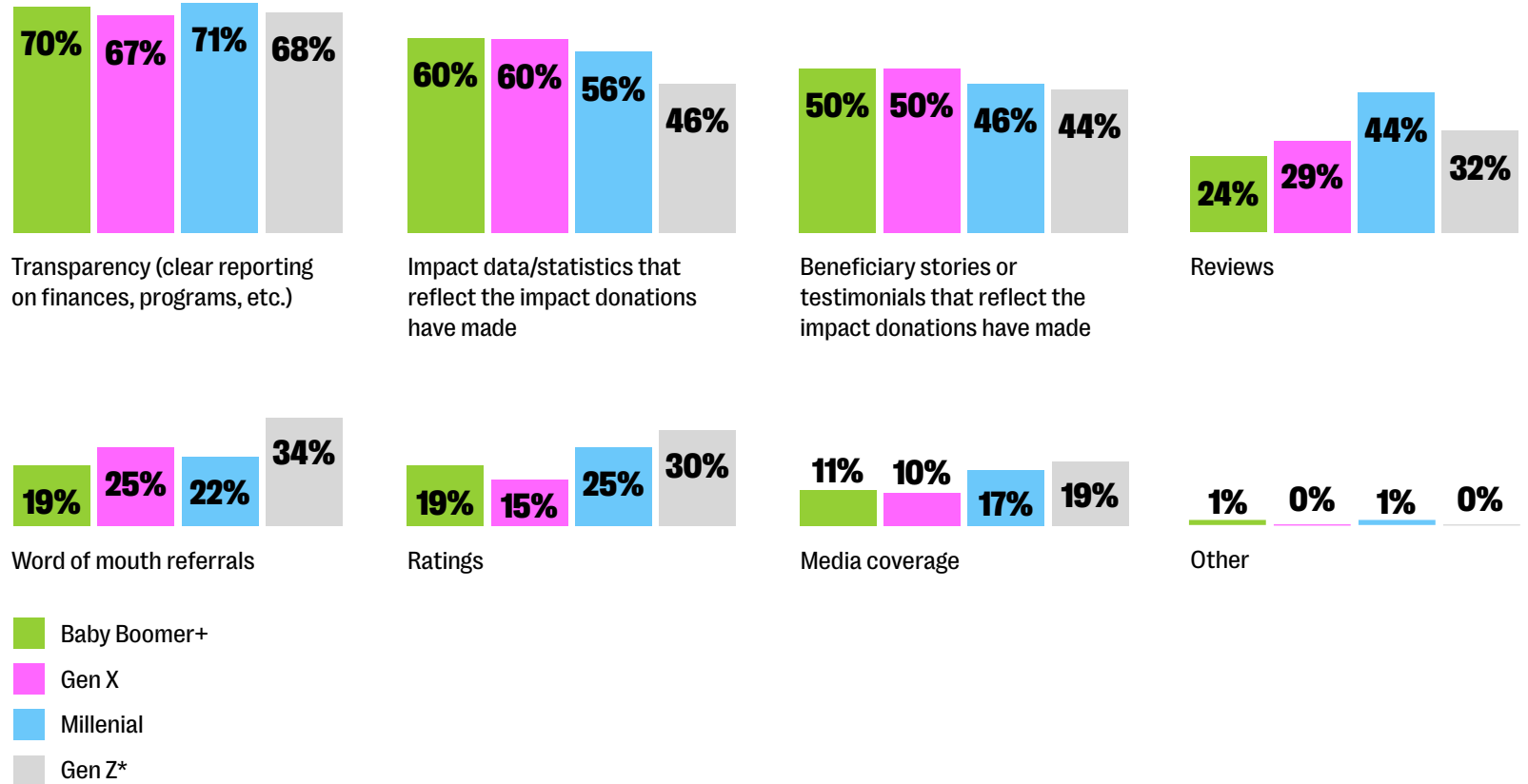
External validation adds another layer, especially for younger donors. Millennials are more likely than older generations to view reviews as an important signal of effectiveness. Millennials and Gen Z<sup>5</sup> are also more likely than Gen X to indicate that ratings are important (with Baby Boomers+ falling in the middle).

**The opportunity:** The practical lesson here is that trust may be the baseline, but proof is critical in strengthening it. Nonprofits need to reinforce existing confidence with visible transparency, concrete impact reporting, and clear signals that donations are making a difference. The best fundraising organizations will use both data and storytelling.

<sup>5</sup> Caution, small base <100, results are directional in nature.

### Factors that Signal Effectiveness

Which of the following most clearly signals to you that a nonprofit is effective? Select up to 3.



Gen Z: n=41, Millennials: n=280, Gen X: n=315, Baby Boomer+ n=367.  
 \*Caution: Gen Z data reflects a small base <100; results are directional in nature.

# Signal Response

## What to do next

Add a plain-language “where your money goes” section to your giving pages, campaign pages, and appeal emails.

Publish a simple impact snapshot every quarter with a few key metrics and one short story of change.

Make your annual report, Form 990, audited financials, or stewardship highlights easier to find from your website navigation and donation pages.

Bring proof into appeals with one data point and one human story instead of saving all evidence for post-gift stewardship.

Collect and curate external validation assets such as ratings, testimonials, press mentions, and partner endorsements for use in campaigns.

Review your donor journey and identify where a first-time visitor can see evidence of effectiveness within the first minute.

# Meeting Donors Where They Are

## Channel fit and convenience shape the giving experience

Donor motivation alone does not determine whether a gift happens. The path to giving matters too. How nonprofits reach donors, where they reach them, and how easy they make the experience all shape whether generosity turns into action.

### EMAIL REMAINS THE ANCHOR CHANNEL

69% of donors say email is a preferred fundraising communication channel, making it the top choice overall and the leading preference across generations.

**69%**

Beyond email, preferences become more segmented:

- Direct mail remains especially important for Baby Boomers+, with more than half preferring it.
- Social media is much more relevant for Millennials and Gen Z<sup>6</sup>, where it ranks near the top of the preferred mix.
- Text messaging also holds more appeal for Millennial donors than for older.

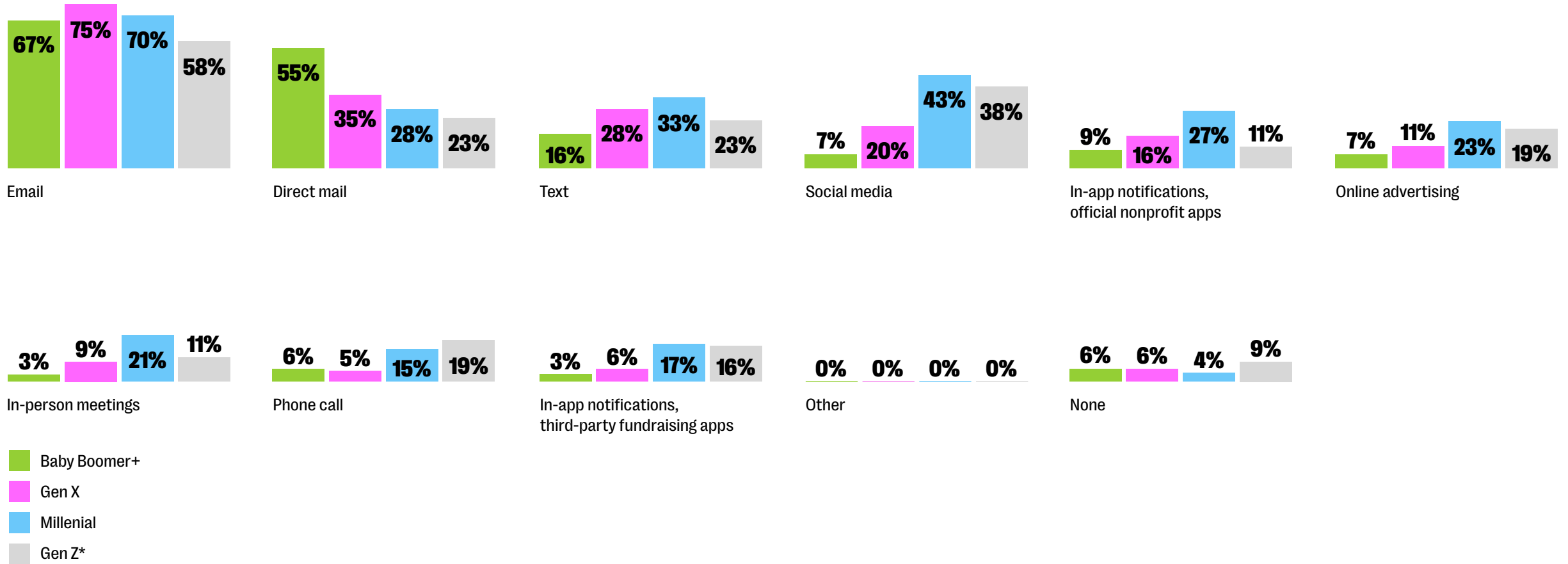
This insight matters because the research also shows donors respond positively when organizations use the channels they prefer. Personalization matters, especially for younger donors, but channel fit matters almost as much. A relevant message delivered in the wrong place can still miss.

<sup>6</sup> Caution, small base <100, results are directional in nature.

**The opportunity:** Reaching donors in the channels they prefer is one of the most direct ways to improve response. Email anchors the mix for every generation, but the right supporting channels differ by audience. Matching message to medium – rather than repurposing identical content everywhere – is where channel strategy pays off.

### Communication Channel Preference by Generation


Through which of the following communications channels do you prefer for a nonprofit organization to reach out to you for fundraising purposes? Select all that apply.




Gen Z: n=41, Millennials: n=280, Gen X: n=315, Baby Boomer+ n=367  
 \*Caution: Gen Z data reflects a small base <100; results are directional in nature.

# Signal Response


## What to do next




Review your channel mix by audience segment and compare it to donor preferences, starting with email, direct mail, social, and text.



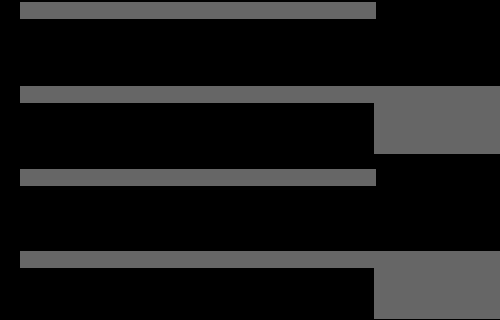
Build channel-specific campaign plans instead of repurposing identical copy everywhere.



Use donor preference data to set communication defaults and let supporters update those preferences easily.



Segment donors by generation and deliver communications via the channels they indicate the strongest preference for.



# The Friction Factor

## How fees and tips are quietly interrupting generosity

Channel fit determines whether a message reaches donors. What happens after the click determines whether the gift actually goes through. And according to the data, the checkout experience is creating more hesitation than most nonprofits realize.

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# 70%

of donors say a prompt to add a tip may cause them to reconsider donating.

## 79% SAY THE SAME ABOUT UNEXPECTED FEES.

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These numbers are notably consistent across generations, which makes this one of the most broadly applicable findings in the report. A donor ready to give – regardless of age – can be stopped by a surprise at checkout. But fees and tips are not the same problem, and they don't have the same fix.

**Fees are an unavoidable cost of processing a gift.** The issue is not that they exist – it's that donors encounter them as a surprise. The fix is transparency: disclose fees clearly before checkout begins, explain what they cover, and give donors the full picture before they commit. Unexpected fees feel like a bait-and-switch. Expected fees, framed honestly, rarely stop a motivated donor.

**Tips are a different matter entirely.** A tip prompt is not a nonprofit decision – it is a discretionary ask the fundraising platform is inserting into your donor's giving experience, often on your behalf and without your explicit input. The donor who just decided to give to your mission is now being asked to fund something else entirely. 70% say this may cause them to reconsider. The fix is not better framing. The fix is usually to turn the prompt off, or ensure it defaults to zero.

**The opportunity:** A strong giving experience starts before the thank-you page. Every unexamined checkout habit is a chance for generosity to walk away. Audit what your donors encounter at the moment of highest intent – and know the difference between what needs better framing and what simply needs to be removed.

# Signal Response

## What to do next

Review your donation platform settings and determine whether tip prompts are enabled. If so, default them to zero or disable them entirely – this is a platform configuration decision, not a design one.

Disclose any processing fees clearly before the final confirmation step, not at checkout. Frame them plainly: what they are, what they cover, and what the donor’s total will be.

Audit every donation form on desktop and mobile. Complete the full giving journey as a first-time donor and note every moment of hesitation, confusion, or surprise.

Run a quarterly “mystery donor” exercise where staff complete the donation journey and flag friction points in real time.

---

## BONUS

Run your donation form through this audit to understand friction in the giving process. Each “yes” is a point.

### FRICION CHECK: YES (+1)

- Does your form ask for a tip or “platform support”?
- Does it surprise donors with processing fees at the end?
- Does it require more than six fields to give?
- Does it bury the “give now” button below the fold on mobile?
- Does it auto-enroll donors in something they didn’t ask for?
- Does it require account creation before giving?

**0-1 POINTS:** You’re respecting your donors. Keep going.

**2-3 POINTS:** You have low-hanging fruit. Fix the easiest one this week.

**4+ POINTS:** Every point is gifts walking away. This is your priority.

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# Millennials Aren't the Donors of Tomorrow

## They're the donors of right now

If you want to know where fundraising is headed, listen to the generation already leading the way.

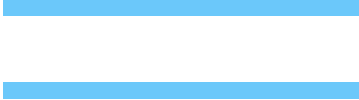
Millennials are the most expansive group in this study. They're planning to give more and they're more willing than any other generation to support a nonprofit they've never given to before. They aren't the biggest donors yet, but with the largest intergenerational wealth transfer in history already underway, they will be.

- 75% expect to give more this year than last – compared with 49% of Gen X and 36% of Baby Boomers+.
- 80% plan to give to at least one new nonprofit this year – compared with 52% of Gen X and 30% of Baby Boomers+.
- 42% have already given through a DAF or other tax-advantaged vehicle – far more than older generations.


But the headline isn't just how much Millennials give. It's how they decide to.

Millennials care about the cause – that part hasn't changed. What's different is the cluster of cues they're using to judge whether a nonprofit is worth their gift. They're checking reviews. They're looking for matching campaigns. They want personalization, mobile-friendly experiences, and outreach in the channels they actually use. And more than any other group, they're looking for a sense of belonging – to feel like they're part of something, not just a name on a thank-you list.

**The opportunity:** Millennial donors aren't a niche audience to fold into a "younger donors" segment. They're a growth engine – and they're telling you exactly what they're listening for. Show them the cause. Show them the proof. Show them they belong. Then give them a reason to come back.



**MORE THAN ANY OTHER GROUP, THEY'RE LOOKING FOR A SENSE OF BELONGING – TO FEEL LIKE THEY'RE PART OF SOMETHING.**



**MILLENNIALS ARE MORE  
LIKELY THAN ANY OTHER  
GENERATION IN THIS  
STUDY TO SAY THEY  
PLAN TO INCREASE THEIR  
GIVING AND SUPPORT  
NEW ORGANIZATIONS.**

# Signal Response

## What to do next

Test campaign creative that emphasizes community participation, measurable impact, and relevance to the future.

Use matching gifts, peer endorsements, and social proof in digital campaigns aimed at Millennial audiences.

Prioritize mobile-friendly experiences across email, social, donation forms, and follow-up communications.

Build personalized follow-up journeys based on campaign response, issue interest, and first-gift behavior.

Track Millennial performance separately in dashboards so shifts in acquisition, retention, average gift, and repeat giving are visible.

Build a Millennial donor strategy that lives outside your “younger donors” bucket. (see right)

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## SIGNAL STRATEGY

Four components in a Millennial donor strategy:

- 01 ACQUISITION MESSAGE.** Test campaign copy that leads with belonging and visible impact, not need.
  - 02 MOBILE EXPERIENCE.** Audit your top three campaign pages on a phone. Fix what's broken before you spend on traffic.
  - 03 REPORTING.** Track Millennial acquisition, retention, and average gift as their own line in your dashboard.
  - 04 A FEEDBACK LOOP.** Stand up a small panel of recurring Millennial donors – 10 to 20 supporters – and test messaging, form changes, and new campaigns with them before you roll out. The generation most likely to give to someone new this year is also the one most willing to tell you why.
-

# DAFs and Tax-Advantaged Giving

## An opportunity with an education gap

Another signal emerging in the data is growing interest in tax-advantaged giving – alongside a clear education gap.

Millennials are by far the most active users in the data: 42% report having made a donation through DAFs or similar options in the past year, compared with much smaller shares among older generations. Millennials are also the most likely to say they are interested in making these kinds of donations in the coming year.

At the same time, nonprofit interest in DAFs appears to be running ahead of donor familiarity:

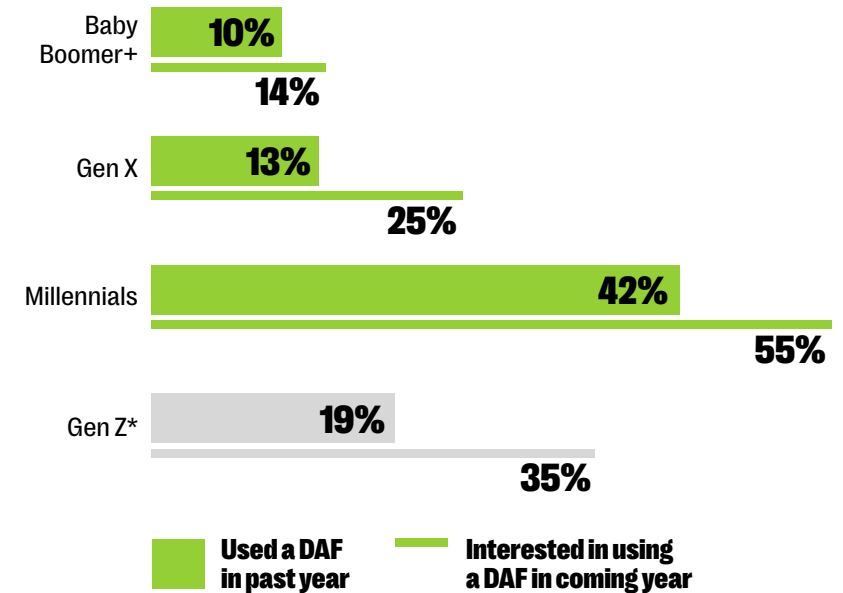
- 12% of donor respondents say they are unsure whether they made a DAF or other tax-advantaged donation in the past year.

- 29% say they are unsure whether they are interested in making a DAF or other tax-advantaged donation in the coming year.
- 64% of organizations say they are prioritizing DAFs or other tax-advantaged giving as part of fundraising strategy.

**The opportunity:** Organizations that want to grow DAF and tax-advantaged giving can create momentum by making these options visible, understandable, and easy to navigate.

## Use of DAFs

*In the past year, have you made any donations via donor-advised funds (DAFs) or other tax-advantaged giving options? In the coming year, are you interested in making any donations via donor-advised funds (DAFs) or other tax-advantaged giving options?*



Gen Z: n=41, Millennials: n=280, Gen X: n=315, Baby Boomer+ n=367.  
 \*Caution: Gen Z data reflects a small base <100; results are directional in nature.

# Signal Response

## What to do next

Add a plain-language DAF explainer to your website, donation page, and year-end giving materials.

Include DAFs and other tax-smart options in donor conversations before year-end instead of waiting for supporters to ask.

Train frontline fundraisers on how to explain these vehicles clearly and confidently.

Create a short FAQ that answers practical donor questions, including how to set up a DAF, and how to disperse funds.

Segment likely prospects for tax-advantaged giving based on donor history, wealth indicators, or prior year-end behavior.

Review your donation experience and confirm that DAF options are easy to find, easy to understand, and easy to complete.

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## WHEN A DONOR ASKS ABOUT DAFs

Have a confident answer ready:

**Q:** “Can I give through my donor-advised fund?”

**A:** “Yes – and we’d love that. Here’s our EIN and the legal name to use with your DAF sponsor. Want me to send a quick one-pager you can forward to them?”

**Q:** “What even is a DAF?”

**A:** “It’s like a charitable savings account. You put money in, get the tax benefit upfront, and recommend gifts to nonprofits over time. Many of our donors use one – happy to walk you through it.”

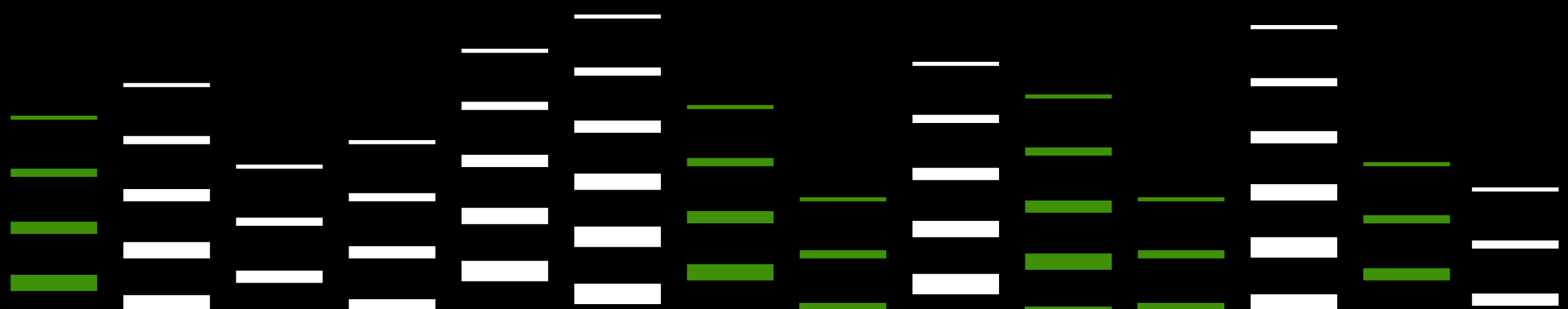
**Q:** “Is my gift tax-advantaged if I give this way?”

**A:** “Yes. The tax deduction happens when you fund the DAF. Your gift to us comes from money that’s already been set aside for charity, which is why it can sometimes mean a larger gift than you’d give from your checking account.”

Confidence is the strategy. The donors are ready – your team needs to be too.

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*Responding to The Giving Signals:*  
How nonprofits are adapting –  
and where to go **NEXT.**



# How Nonprofit Leaders Are Responding

## Adapting, investing, and trying to meet the moment

The signal from nonprofit leaders is encouraging: Organizations are listening, adapting, and investing to meet the moment.

- 91% of nonprofit leaders say donor contributions in 2026 will make up a larger share of revenue than last year.
- Nonprofit leaders say they expect to rely on major donors (90%), recurring donors (89%), and new donors (89%) to meet financial targets.


Fundraising pressure is real, and nonprofit leaders are responding with intention.

There is also strong evidence that organizations are trying to adapt for younger donors.

- 97% say they are adjusting fundraising or donor outreach strategies to reflect the preferences and priorities of younger donors, including 46% who say they are doing so significantly.

- Most nonprofit leaders also report customizing communications in meaningful ways: based on the time of year a donor typically gives, the donor's preferred communication channels, the donor's interests, or the donor's past giving.
- Only 4% of nonprofit leaders say they are not significantly customizing communications.

In terms of channel use, social media and email are the most commonly used tools in donor outreach strategies. Leaders also report prioritizing a broad range of messaging themes, including mission and organizational needs, belonging to a community, and supporting a specific community or region. Confidence in stewardship is also high.



**FUNDRAISING PRESSURE IS REAL, AND NONPROFIT LEADERS ARE RESPONDING WITH INTENTION.**



“It’s important to not assume you already know where donors want to hear from you. In addition to this report, **FOLLOW UP DIRECTLY WITH YOUR DONORS** via surveys and conversations.”

**Claire Axelrad**

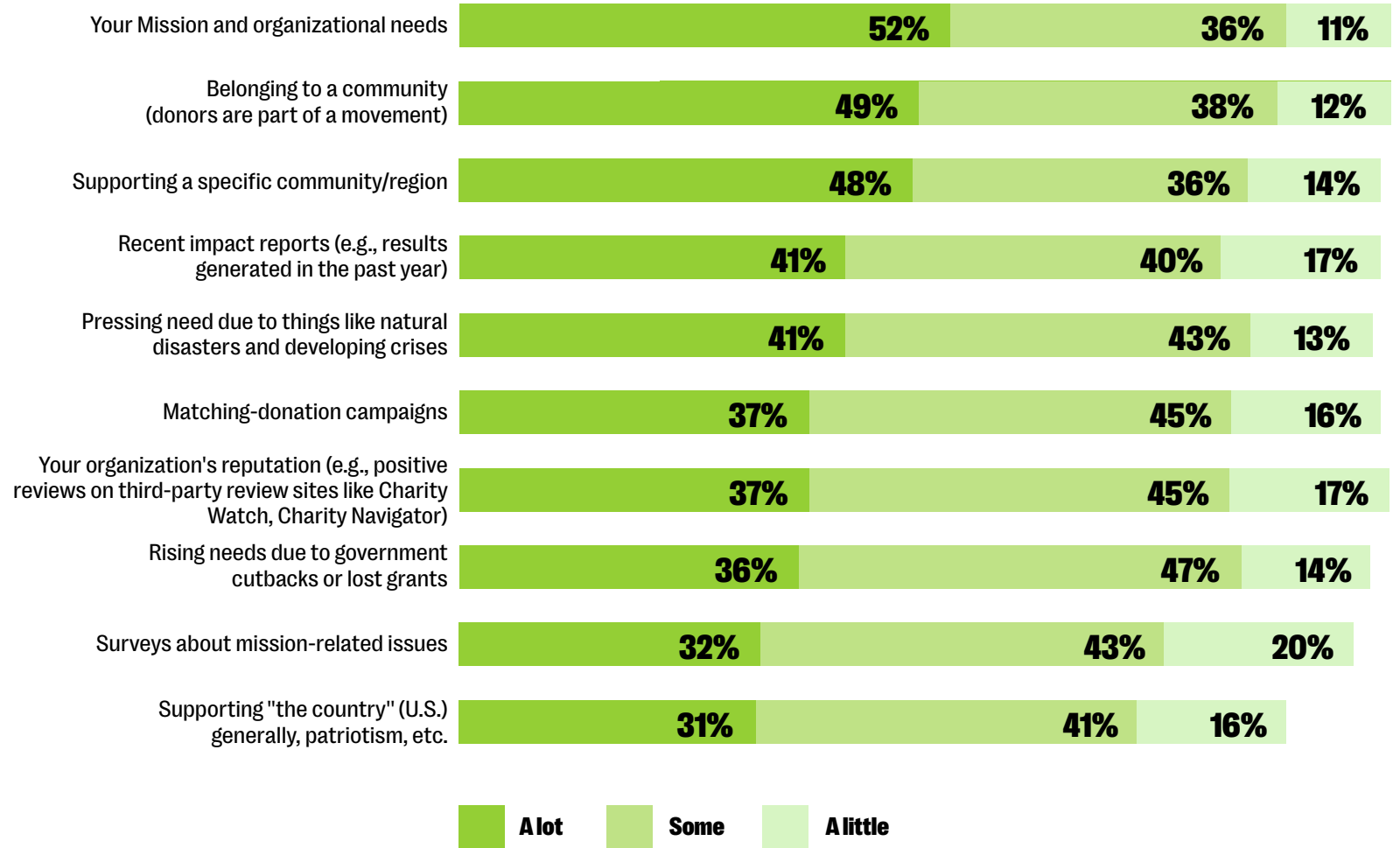
Principal

Clairification & Fundraising Coach

- Track behavior – what channels are driving engagement?
- Measure outcomes – what channels actually convert?

**Messages and Offerings Prioritized by Fundraising Organizations**

*How heavily, if at all, is your organization prioritizing each of the following messages and/or offerings in fundraising/donor-outreach communications?*

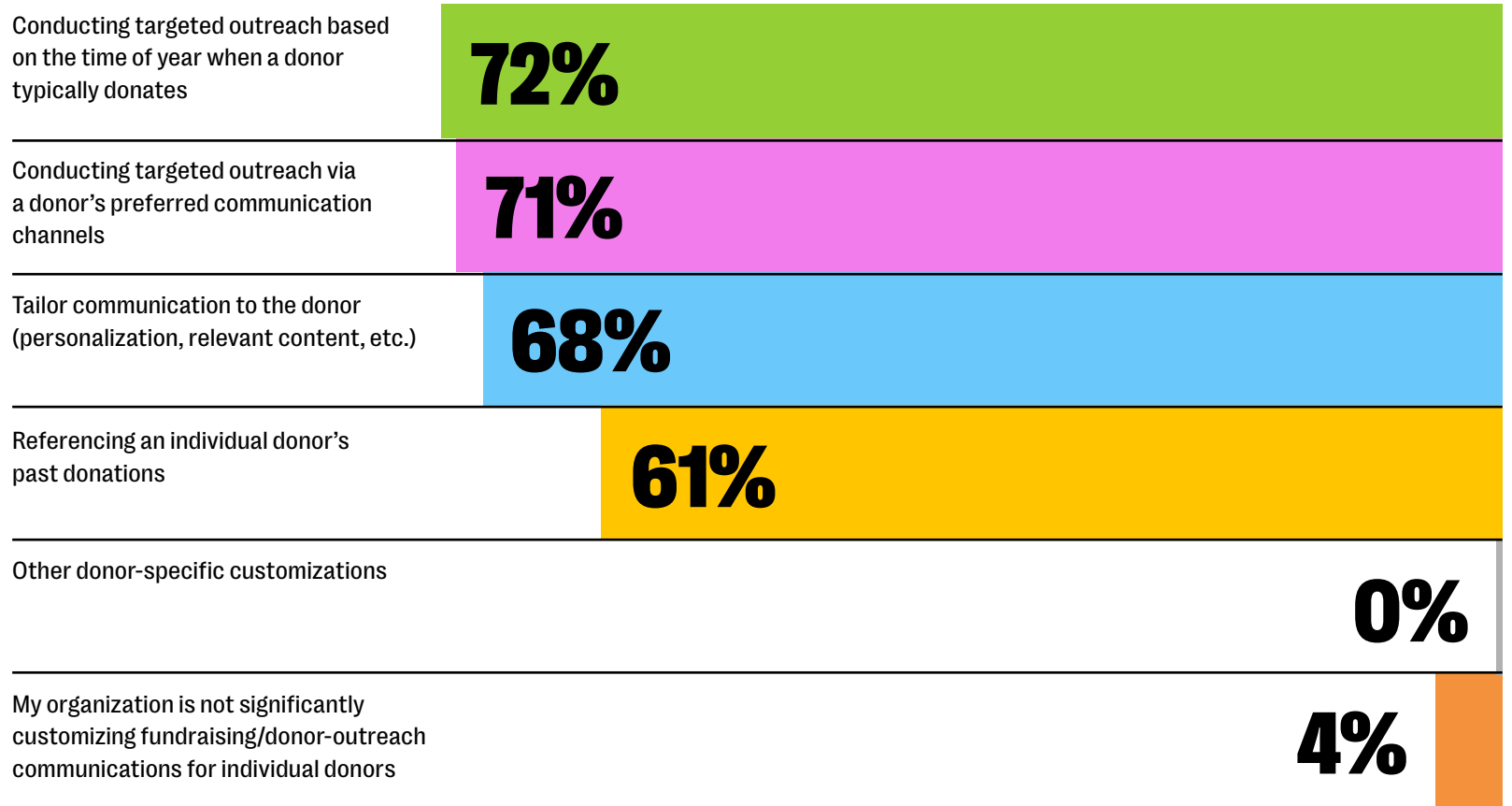


Base size: n=405

Most nonprofit leaders say their organizations do a good job thanking donors, making donors feel valued, making giving easy, respecting communication preferences, and demonstrating impact. And importantly, donor responses support that confidence

### Common Customizations for Fundraising Communications

*In what ways, if at all, are you customizing fundraising/donor-outreach communications? Select all that apply.*



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“Regularly audit your donation pages to ensure you’re avoiding ‘money left on the table syndrome.’ Ask yourself: is there **A CLEAR, COMPELLING REASON TO GIVE RIGHT NOW?**”

**Claire Axelrad**

Principal

Clairification & Fundraising Coach

- Are we asking for too much information?
- How many clicks does it take to complete a gift?
- Does it work seamlessly on mobile?
- Are there distractions pulling people away from the page?
- Are we offering the payment methods donors expect?

**THE OVERALL PICTURE IS ENCOURAGING. NONPROFITS ARE NOT STANDING STILL. THEY ARE LISTENING, ADJUSTING, AND INVESTING. MANY ARE ALREADY MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.**

# The Opportunity Gap

## Where donor signals and nonprofit strategy diverge

Nonprofits are doing a lot right. Donors feel appreciated. They feel valued. They see the impact you're working to create.

The opportunity isn't a fundamental rift between donors and the organizations they support. It's a series of small, fixable mismatches in how nonprofit strategy is showing up in the moments that matter most.

Here's where donors are sending one signal — and where nonprofit strategy is responding with another.

**The channel gap.** Donors say email is their top fundraising channel — by a wide margin and across every generation. Nonprofits report leading with social media. Social isn't the wrong channel. It's just not the channel donors are asking you to lead with. Rebalance.

**The friction gap.** 70% of donors say a tip prompt makes them reconsider giving. 79% say the same about unexpected fees. Meanwhile, 44% of nonprofits still ask donors to tip at checkout. Here's the precision worth pushing: fees and tips are not the same thing. Fees are a cost — the fix is transparency. Tips are a discretionary ask the platform is making on your behalf — the fix is usually to turn them off. Every unexamined checkout habit is a chance for generosity to walk away.

**The message gap.** Donors are asking for three things: alignment with the issue, clarity on where their money goes, and proof of impact. Nonprofits often lead with mission, organizational need, and community. Those messages still resonate — but they aren't enough on their own. Donors want the what-next spelled out alongside the why.

“To level up fundraising messaging nonprofits need to also focus on identity. **WHO AM I WHEN I GIVE?** That’s massively more powerful than *why do I give.*”

**Rachel Muir**


Girlstart

Founder & Nonprofit Consultant


- What am I saying about myself when I support your organization?
- Nonprofits can and should position every piece of donor communications to reflect this, but especially both the appeal and the thank you.

**The Millennial gap.** For younger donors, reviews, ratings, matching, personalization, and channel fit carry real weight. Most nonprofit strategies don't yet reflect that. The donors most likely to give more – and to give to someone new – are the ones whose preferences are being least consistently met. That's a strategic blind spot worth closing.

**The Gen Z growth gap.** 71% of nonprofit leaders say they are counting on younger donors – and specifically Gen Z – to hit financial targets. While reliance on other types of donors (including major, recurring, and existing donors) was higher, the fact that almost three in four organizations expect to rely on a generation has not yet come into its own as a driver of giving – and is less likely to give than any other generation – could signal a gap between expectation and reality.



**THE GOOD NEWS: NONE OF THIS IS STRUCTURAL. DONORS AREN'T ASKING FOR A NEW MISSION. THEY'RE ASKING FOR SHARPER EXECUTION ON THE ONE YOU ALREADY HAVE.**



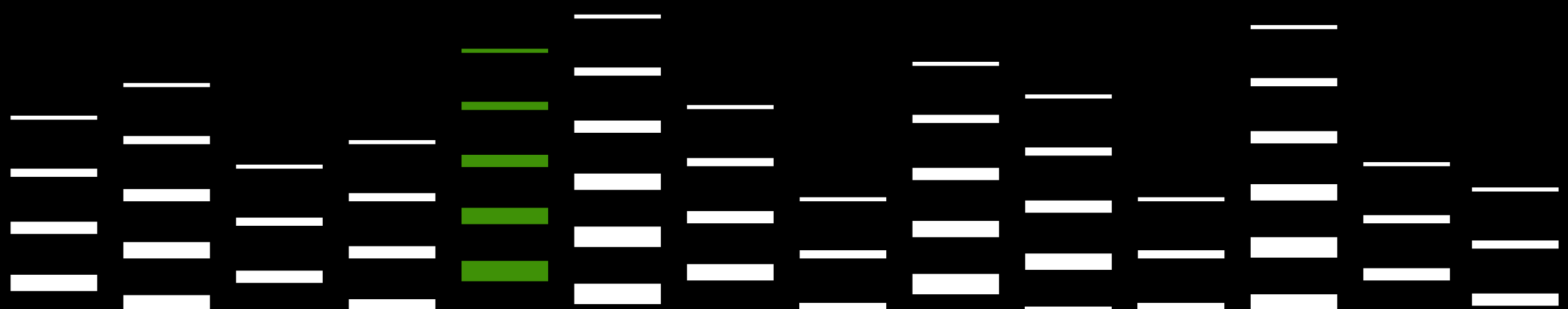
“Generic messages, one-size-fits all communications, and little to no personalization don’t work for any donor, especially Millennials. **MILLENNIALS DON’T SEE GIVING AS SOMETHING THEY DO. They see it as part of who they are.**”

**Rachel Muir**  
Girlstart  
Founder & Nonprofit Consultant

- Even if they’re not your cash cow today, they will inherit and control massive philanthropic dollars in the coming decades. Closing the blind spot in your messaging will boost your performance across the board with all donors and secure you the loyalty of these future major donors.

*Conclusion:*

Follow the **GIVING** signals.



**Generosity is still here,  
and it is speaking clearly**

Donors continue to care deeply about the causes and communities they support. They trust nonprofits. They want to make a difference. They are also giving nonprofit teams a clear set of signals about what helps them move from caring to giving: relevance, transparency, belonging, convenience, and confidence.

For nonprofits, that is a powerful place to begin. The path forward is full of practical opportunities to sharpen strategy, strengthen connection, and make generosity easier to act on. When organizations follow the giving signals, they can meet supporters with greater precision, create more confident giving experiences, and build momentum that lasts.



**SEE WHAT'S CHANGING.  
SHAPE WHAT'S NEXT.**

**THAT IS HOW NONPROFITS  
TURN INSIGHT INTO ACTION  
AND KEEP PUSHING  
PURPOSE HIGHER.**



Caring to Giving

**RELEVANCE**

Transparency

**BELONGING**

Convenience

**CONNECTION**

