

THE  
MILLENNIAL  
IMPACT REPORT



**FINAL 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

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"We believe the body of research now available can inform all causes on the structural and attitudinal changes needed to fully embrace, support and integrate these active, passionate believers into their organizational efforts."

– Derrick Feldmann

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# LETTER FROM JEAN CASE

Letter from the Founder, Millennial Impact Project

At the Case Foundation, we have the ambitious mission to invest in the people and the ideas that can change the world. That's exactly why 10 years ago, when we saw the passion, idealism and commitment to service from a new and clearly influential generation of young people, our team embarked on a project to understand how to harness this incredible energy through the organizations and causes at the forefront of social impact. It was clear that marketers and consumer behavior researchers had made this generation their priority and perceived that this generation would have a significant impact due to their purchasing power, but we wanted to be sure the social sector understood what influenced their interest in making the world a better place and, just maybe, shed some light on the most effective ways to empower millennials to change the world.

**That's how we realized that they're not just trying to change the world; millennials are actually changing the way that social change is made.**

Building off of the experiences we had studying the need for a renewal of powerful civic participation and local community engagement through citizen-centered approaches in our 2006 report *Citizens at the Center*,<sup>2</sup> we launched our first report on the millennial generation in 2008. *Social Citizens: A Look at the Unique Characteristics of Millennials and Their Impact on Civic Engagement* identified the potential power in "a nascent model and era of citizen participation that combines idealism, digital fluency and immersion in social causes."

The Millennial Impact Project was born of this research. Since 2009, research teams have mapped the behaviors and preferences of more than 150,000 young people in order to understand the dynamic between causes and millennial cause enthusiasts.

In the midst of the public disillusionment at that time, we witnessed hopefulness from the millennial generation as it first entered adulthood. And much of that idealism has remained. We've continued to see millennials seek out possibilities across all aspects of their lives to have a positive impact on society and question norms that might pose barriers to implementing their ideas for social impact.

"We've continued to see millennials seek out possibilities across all aspects of their lives to have a positive impact on society and question norms that might pose barriers to implementing their ideas for social impact."

To be clear, we are not declaring that we've figured it all out and have all the answers about the millennial generation. In fact, in 10 years, the more we've learned, the more questions we have and the more curious we've become about the experiences of different groups within the generation. We know that the millennial generation is not a monolith, and there is still plenty to research about how differing characteristics within this diverse generation influence their engagement with and interest in different causes.

If readers take away nothing else from this body of research and the recommendations covered in this report, we hope one thing becomes clear: You need to constantly engage young people in your cause. Social issues, technology and culture will only continue to change at an accelerated rate. We have to be nimble, curious and constantly asking ourselves how to improve our approaches and how effectively we are working in partnership with young people toward a shared mission.

The same old methods of engagement just won't cut it anymore.

Finally, I would be remiss not to say that over the course of 10 years, we've had the opportunity to work with partners and leaders who've shaped and influenced our efforts, and our millennial engagement portfolio is truly reflective of that. Before sharing the report, I want to thank the many, many individuals and organizations from all sectors who left their mark on the Millennial Impact Project. It has been made much richer from your continued support, and this is yet another testament to the power of partnerships and the necessity of convening diverse voices. I and the team at the Case Foundation are sincerely grateful for your support, advice and insights.

Sincere thanks,  
Jean Case

<sup>1</sup> Fine, Allison. 2008. *Social Citizens: A Look at the Unique Characteristics of Millennials and Their Impact on Civic Engagement*. Washington, DC: Case Foundation. Gibson, Cynthia M. 2006. *Citizens at the Center: A New Approach to Civic Engagement*. Washington, DC: Case Foundation.





# LETTER FROM DERRICK FELDMANN

Letter from the Founder, Millennial Impact Project

Covering 10 years of data, the Case Foundation's millennial research provides a unique opportunity to look at this influential generation and how it sees change. Having partnered with the Case Foundation on much of this research and led many of the key elements of the work, I can confidently say this generation is on its way to becoming the most change making generation in our country's history.

They are the most diverse generation America has ever seen<sup>1</sup> and are demanding diversity in their schools, companies, nonprofits and elected officials. Years of studies have shown that regardless of their personal backgrounds or experiences, they consistently care about employment and health care, the quality and affordability of education, and civil rights and racial discrimination (whether they themselves have experienced prejudice or not). They expect government to protect human rights everywhere and act when those rights are threatened anywhere. They believe politicians should be able to further the good of society collaboratively, regardless of what party they're affiliated with.

Millennials have been able to unite around their passions in large numbers, thanks to social media and a digital landscape that's growing at lightning speed. Fluent in digital technology before graduating from high school, most have rarely known a day without high levels of digital interaction. While companies and causes struggle to keep up, millennials are adapting to new technologies as quickly as they become available – and using them to force attention onto the issues that matter to them.

These tech-savvy millennials became America's primary source of new employees, first-year college students – and, for causes, potential constituents.

In the past, young people who wanted to serve but could not find an outlet tended to lose interest or be steered to a handful of well-known cause organizations, such as the Peace Corps. Today, young people who want to serve believe they don't necessarily need to work through any organizations to create change. They have their own methods, and they believe in their own ability to make a difference.

**Causes must believe in these young people's ability, too, and look at cause engagement holistically. Everyone, including millennials, can add value.**

While it has taken some time for causes to begin seeing millennials without prejudice, those with the most foresight have already begun to adapt to their brand-new ways of approaching change. We believe this body of research now available can inform all causes on the structural and attitudinal changes needed to fully embrace, support and integrate these active, passionate believers into their efforts.

The 10 years of research that is the basis for this report shows unequivocally that the old rules simply do not apply anymore. The millennial generation is not interested in being limited by old paradigms and roles, or being beholden to a status quo that they don't believe serves them and others. The sooner causes understand and begin to evolve their practices to work in partnership with the innovative, deeply caring people they're dealing with, the better off the world will be.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Derrick Feldmann'.

Derrick Feldmann  
Founder, The Millennial Impact Project

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<sup>2</sup> The millennial generation: A demographic bridge to America's diverse future, The Brookings Institution, January 2018



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In a 2007 article for *The New York Times*, journalist and author Thomas Friedman referred to millennials as “members of Generation Q” – meaning they were the quiet, inactive generation as far as social issues were concerned. Put this description alongside the “self-centered and lazy” labels seen all too often in media headlines of the past decade, and one would have believed that this new wave of American adults could never be counted on to lift their heads from their devices to think about anyone or anything else.

Little did most people realize that these young Americans were beginning to use those devices and other burgeoning technologies to set the world of cause engagement on its ear.

Whether they yet recognized it or not, causes would be forced to appeal to this age group, so understanding their intrinsic motivations was vital to their future. When Jean Case and the Case Foundation team looked at these issues in 2008, they realized little research had been done on millennials at the time and even less on how they engaged with causes, social good and movement building – but people did want to learn more.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the Case Foundation launched a decade of research to do just that.

These 10 years of research – which created the largest body of data and analysis on how U.S. millennials interact with causes – have led to this report, which demonstrates why and how the nation’s youngest generation of adults has engaged in doing good, how they have changed philanthropy, what they expect of the public, private, nonprofit and government sectors in addressing societal challenges and the consequences of ignoring their powerful influence.

3 2018 research



“We’ve continued to see millennials seek out possibilities across all aspects of their lives to have a positive impact on society and question norms that might pose barriers to implementing their ideas for social impact.”  
– Jean Case

The mountain of data and analysis created by this decade of study, actions, trends and behaviors have led to a general framework for understanding young (1980 – 2000) constituents. Based on careful review of the data from the decade-long project, including data on the behaviors and preferences of more than 150,000 millennials, we have identified 10 traits characterizing young people's approaches to cause engagement:

#### **Millennials**

- see all of their assets as equal,
- are everyday changemakers, and
- believe in the power of activism.

#### **Millennials care about**

- social issues rather than institutions,
- using their collective voice, and
- supporting others and the greater good more than ineffective partisan politicking.

#### **Millennials engage with causes**

- through a range of sectors and industries,
- by employing innovative approaches, and
- through actions both big and small.

#### **Millennials are influenced**

- largely by their peers.

While this report provides key findings that shed a light on the ways that the millennial generation participates in major movements and causes, it is also designed to outline a broader approach that can be used to continue asking questions and improving the ability of socially conscious businesses and organizations to work with young people.

Whether in spite or because of their youth, millennials have created new ways to bring about real changes in society over the last decade, and we suspect that new waves of young people will continue to drive even greater change. The key purpose of this report is to inform practitioners about the opportunities to discard a one-size-fits-all mentality and adopt more responsive models of constituent engagement to better meet young cause enthusiasts where they are.



# INTRODUCTION

Ten years ago, the Case Foundation released *Social Citizens*, a non-traditional discussion paper that intentionally raised more questions than answers. Intrigued by the first digital generation in history, the Foundation sought to gain insight into how millennials think and feel about civic involvement.

Their findings inspired and excited many. The Foundation's research revealed a passionate drive to engage with social causes and movements – and new ideas for doing so.

*Social Citizens* thus became the starting point of a set of research into the millennial generation as cause enthusiasts. It was a platform for conversations and collaborations exploring how to nurture and support their deep wish for meaningful engagement. This starting point was followed by an annual body of research and a convening, collectively called the Millennial Impact Project.

<i>2010 and 2011 Millennial Donor Survey and Report</i>	Millennials make philanthropic decisions based on personal, not digital, connections.
<i>2012 Millennial Impact Report</i>	Trust is of the utmost importance in millennial giving decisions.
<i>2013 Millennial Impact Report</i>	Millennials prioritize issues and people over institutions.
<i>2014 Millennial Impact Report</i>	Millennials consider a company's cause work in employment decisions.
<i>2015 Millennial Impact Report</i>	Millennials are motivated to give and volunteer based on co-workers' participation.
<i>2016 Millennial Impact Report Retrospective</i>	Millennials move toward greater activism as they age.
<i>2016 Millennial Impact Report</i>	Millennials believe more strongly in their own power than in nonprofits to create change.
<i>2017 Millennial Impact Report</i>	Millennials don't agree with the direction of the country and are ready to act to create the change they want to see.

"We've moved from participating locally to having this bigger voice: My tweet affects people, for real, and can affect people across the world. The way millennials communicate has changed the way people engage with social causes." – **Nicole Hicks, Director of Youth Initiatives for the American Cancer Society**

From the Case Foundation's first review of millennials to today, we've witnessed the generation age into adulthood, and due to its size and the strength of its voice through many mediums, it's undeniable that they've had a remarkable influence across sectors. We've seen their disinterest in party politics, desire for more socially responsible brands and empathetic interests in helping others change the way institutions function around the globe. And we hope this passion is passed on to future generations.

The *Millennial Impact Report* series has become one of the most trusted sources of research on millennials and causes, helping organizations, corporations and individuals everywhere understand

the best approaches to cultivating interest and involvement with this generation. By bringing this research together in one summary report, we hope that this report will serve as a tool to prepare the organizations who want to be a conduit for future generations to do good, to build more impactful partnerships with millennials today and more young people in the future. This is why we've designed the report to share our key learnings from 10 years of research as well as recommendations for practitioners to operationalize the findings and continue to keep up with the pace of change in an evolving social sector.

## These recommendations cover:

- knowing your constituents,
- keeping up with their interests and concerns,
- understanding how they participate in causes, and
- recognizing what influences their behavior.



# WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION

## "Who Are Millennials?"

Over 10 years we learned that millennials are not a monolith; they're the most diverse generation to transition into adulthood. And the young people coming up behind them are even more so. We have, however, identified a shared, inherent desire to help those who have a weak voice or none at all. They want to improve the world every day and believe they can do it.

One thing has been clear since the start of these studies: Millennials not only want to give and serve – they have a passionate desire to do so, and they aren't interested in spending their time and talents on shallow involvement.

We enumerated a set of trend characteristics in 2014 following four years of the Millennial Impact Project research that have held true through each subsequent year of study.

### In a nutshell, millennials

- › engage with causes to help other people, not institutions;
- › support issues rather than organizations;
- › prefer to perform smaller actions before fully committing to a cause;
- › are influenced by the decisions and behaviors of their peers;
- › treat all their assets (time, money, network, etc.) as having equal value; and
- › need to experience an organization's work without having to be on-site.

Millennials today want to engage their minds as well as their hands in the service of causes.<sup>4</sup> They want to directly contribute ideas and direction, especially in leadership roles. While they acknowledge that young professionals' groups provide a great opportunity to informally get to know a cause and each other, young adults want a more active role in participating in the management and execution of cause work as individuals or in a small group.<sup>5</sup>

This attitude reflects their desire to build authentic, personal relationships with the people and causes they serve. Part of this is feeling the emotions that come with knowing the results of their contributions of time, talent and treasure – the assets they have to offer, which have equal value in their eyes.<sup>6</sup>

"Giving my time and leadership to an organization is something I can do while I can't give a lot financially at this point in life." – a millennial, 2012 Millennial Impact Report

Politically, millennials are reluctant to label themselves as more conservative-leaning or more liberal-leaning; most place themselves around the center, on both sides. They explain this lack of commitment by saying they are uncertain which party best represents their views, they hold ideals from points across the spectrum, and they are dissatisfied with political bickering and infighting.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, millennials are voters, defying low voter-turnout forecasts in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Millennials believe in the power of the vote, and many consider voting to be an American's duty. Time and again, they name voting as the number-one action they prefer to take in support of an issue as well as the action they believe to be the most likely to engender change.

<sup>4</sup> 2012 Millennial Impact Report

<sup>5</sup> 2014 Millennial Impact Report

<sup>6</sup> 2014 Millennial Impact Report

<sup>7</sup> 2016 Millennial Impact Report

However, our pre-election to post-election studies revealed surprising facts about this group's voting behaviors, as well as distinct behaviors among self-identified voting males and females. For example:

- **Voter registration.** Initially, fewer millennial females than males reported having registered to vote in the 2016 election. As the campaign wore on, the percentage of females who said they'd registered declined, while the percentage of registered males remained steady. Election Day would show that nearly 10% more males (86%) than females (78%) were registered to vote.
- **At the ballot box.** Actual voting figures were lower on Election Day, as they normally are, with 65% of millennials saying they voted. However, 21% fewer females (55%) than males (76%) reported having voted.<sup>8</sup> Surprising to those who held to the stereotypes of this generation, 39% of the millennials who cast a vote said they did so for Donald Trump – a figure further validated by 2017 research.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> 2016 Millennial Impact Report

<sup>9</sup> "Who Is More Involved in Causes Today, Women or Men? You May Be Surprised." Research study brief from the 2017 Millennial Impact Report. Washington, DC: Case Foundation.

## Passionate About Issues, Not Institutions

"Millennial donors are not committed to a single organization; they are more committed to a cause. So, their loyalty is to an issue they care about or are passionate about. And whether they give money or volunteer, it's not necessarily directed at one organization."

– Justin Wheeler



90%

would stop giving if they distrusted an organization.

&



90%

are motivated to give by a compelling mission, not an organization.

## Millennials Believe All Assets Are Equal

In each of the studies summarized in this report, millennials have expressed or demonstrated the belief that their time, skills, talent, money, voice, purchasing power and ability to network all have equal value, and they offer them as such. This generation does not prize being a financial donor above being a volunteer, or activating their peer network as more valuable than signing a petition. When they are inspired to do something, they see their behavior (no matter what it is) as significant support.

### Here's a typical millennial's take on the value of mentoring children one-on-one, for example:

"With mentoring, I [consider myself] highly engaged because that's as grassroots as it gets. I'm interacting with an individual at risk for ill-fated things like failing school, [and] I'm highly engaged in changing or directing his behavior toward the path that would steer him away from those things."<sup>10</sup>

## Millennials Are Everyday Changemakers

Millennials exhibit social good in small acts they perform every day: making an impulsive point-of-sale donation, bidding in an online charity auction, getting their friends together for a bike ride for charity, purchasing a product that supports its indigenous maker or from a company that shares its profits to help fill a need (or avoiding one that doesn't), and making socially responsible investments designed to bring about a social good the investor supports.

This internalization of social good has been slow to be recognized by older generations and millennials alike as "social engagement." Small actions taken almost as a matter of course can be "doing good" yet not trigger a large-scale impact or be a readily noticeable action. Small actions do gain momentum and turn into movements, too, such as giving up single-use plastics that have led to states banning plastic straws and utensils.

Seeing such impact incites more engagement, said 2018 interviewee Maya Enista Smith, Born This Way Foundation

executive director and former Mobilize CEO. She pointed out that the early *Social Citizens* report showed individuals to be problem solvers, which led to changes in organizing and movement building. "Once a millennial believes their voice has power, that's an addictive feeling. Someone's looking to you and cares what you're saying," she said.

That "someone who cares" should be a nonprofit or company that is an active contributor to conversations and information flows in the digital space.

"I feel like you can be an activist in small ways that make a big impact. For me, by making a donation and talking to my friends about [an issue], I might be inspiring action in others. I pay attention to where I spend my money, too, [which is] the biggest impact you can have in certain areas. So, I would say I am [an activist], but not in the same way other people might think."

– Millennial survey respondent, 2017

An anonymous survey respondent in 2018 sees "the everyday do-gooder" as millennials' legacy. "Millennials will be remembered for integrating cause engagement into their daily lives. It's not something they do sometimes or think about sometimes; it's a part of who they are and what they expect of one another."



## I Millennials Believe in Activism

Millennials seem to believe that what the industry views as traditional activism – voting, petitions, protests, marches, and the like – is still the most influential way to bring about change.



In 2017, voting topped the list of the actions most often taken by millennials and was the action they deemed most likely to be influential; 71% consider voting to be activism.

Self-identified activists were more likely to contact their representatives and/or take part in marches/rallies than to use social media in cause support. Worth noting, however, is that after the 2016 U.S. presidential election, a portion of millennials were beginning to imbue the term "activist" with more intense actions than voting, such as taking part in a protest, to effect national change. Later in 2017, they expanded the activities of an activist to include social media posts.

Overall, millennials were fairly evenly split between whether their own actions or those of organizations hold the most power to create change.<sup>11</sup>

Our research reflects a rising popularity in the opinion that millennials have redefined activism by combining protests, social organizing and social media messaging as individuals and in the aggregate. The digital age allows word to spread with lightning speed and gives access and a voice to more individuals – and a wider variety of them – than ever before. Others say that the behaviors constituting activism have not changed, only the medium.

# What Millennials Care About

Civil rights/racial discrimination, health care (for themselves and their aging parents and grandparents), education and employment are the causes millennials in this country consistently care the most about.

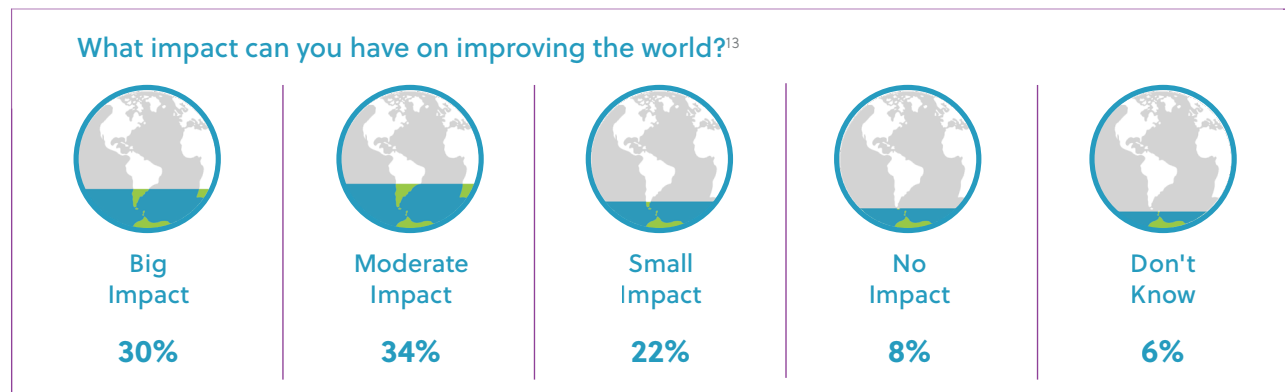
As we have witnessed with such movements as #BlackLivesMatter and the Women's March, millennials are willing to be active about issues that affect them directly. At the same time, however, they engage on behalf of people who cannot speak for themselves. To a degree not seen in any previous generation, millennials see themselves in the shoes of others who don't look like them, speak the same language, have the same education or come from the same background, perhaps because of their high level of diversity.<sup>12</sup>

Overwhelmingly, millennials in our studies are interested in causes/social issues relevant to quality of life for everyone, including, as a matter of course, people who historically have been marginalized or disenfranchised.

This focus naturally leads millennials to follow their hearts. They go where the causes call them, rather than remaining loyal to an institution that serves an issue. For example, millennials are supporting five nonprofits a year on average.

The strength of their passion is reflected in their belief in themselves, which also could explain why they don't remain loyal to institutions. If millennials believe they

can improve the world – and in 2016, 86% said they can make a difference – then they'd want to do so wherever and as much as they can.



Thus, millennials have kicked off an evolution that will turn the concept of donor loyalty to a single nonprofit into a thing of the past.

<sup>12</sup> 2017 MIR  
<sup>13</sup> 2016 MIR

## Millennials Are Passionate About Issues, Not Institutions

In 2011, 63% of millennials gave to three or more nonprofits. One year later, they gave to five, with nearly 90% planning to give to five again the following year. By 2015, nearly 90% articulated that a compelling mission or cause – not an organization – was what motivated them to give.

As Justin Wheeler, founder and CEO of Fundraise, said, “Millennial donors are not committed to a single organization; they are more committed to a cause. So, their loyalty is to an issue they care about or are passionate about. And whether they give money or volunteer, it’s not necessarily directed at one organization.”<sup>14</sup>

If passion for an issue drives millennials to get involved, trust keeps them true to an institution addressing their issue. More than 90% said they would stop giving to an organization if they began distrusting it. In a reflection of that trust, more than three-fourths would stop giving if they weren't told how their contributions help.<sup>15</sup>

Even involvement in workplace giving programs demonstrates their loyalty to a cause (or causes) rather than to their employer or an intermediary institution. While close to half of millennials have participated in an employer giving campaign, almost a third did so out of passion for the cause, **not loyalty to the company**.<sup>16</sup>

### “I Gave at the Office”

Workplace giving campaigns are a common way for companies to engage in cause work – and engage millennials. It’s important to note that millennial employees will donate to causes they feel passionate about, *whether their company is involved with those causes or not*. Actions such as matching employee donations, offering incentives and generating competition may successfully boost involvement in company-sponsored giving, but passion for the cause – more specifically, the need – is what consistently motivates employee giving.

#### – 2015 Millennial Impact Report

### Leading Influences: Peer Influence Is Key

This trend has been seen across many years of our millennial research as millennials have consistently reported that they often invite friends to join their volunteer and fundraising efforts and are more likely to engage in a cause if their peers are already participating.

#### 2015 EMPLOYEE CAUSE PARTICIPATION

More likely to donate if supervisor does

27%

More likely to donate if co-worker does

46%

More likely to donate if CEO does

21%

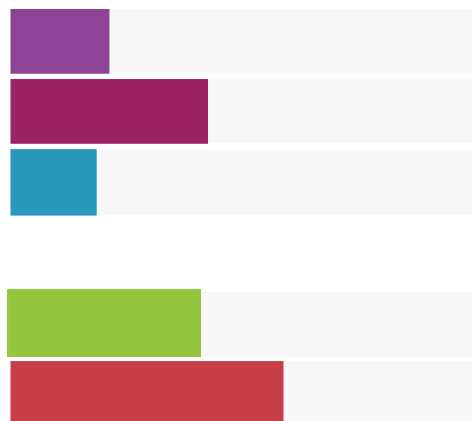
#### SIMILARLY

More likely to volunteer if supervisor does

44%

More likely to volunteer if co-worker does

65%



<sup>14</sup> 2018 research

<sup>15</sup> Millennial Impact Top 100, 2011

<sup>16</sup> MIR 2016



## I Millennials Value Collective Action and Networks

Education has remained a priority for millennials throughout the decade – not just college affordability, but the quality of elementary education, too. But in the last couple of years, millennials have found their collective voice and used it to address other social ills. By 2017, education was joined by the headline issues of civil rights/racial discrimination, employment/job creation, healthcare reform and climate change (with immigration close behind) as priorities.

“[My concern with] healthcare especially [has increased] because I have aging parents who are going to be impacted. And, given my volunteerism with the ambulance service, I have a lot of patients on Medicaid and Medicare. I am concerned what will happen with them.” – **Millennial survey respondent, 2017**

They joined in the outcry against banning refugees and immigrants from specific countries. They spoke up for “Dreamers.” They supported the rights of sexual harassment victims to be believed. Now, they’re lending their considerable voices to the gun debate.

## I Millennials Support the Greater Good, Not Partisan Politicking

Millennials are both empathetic to the needs of others and discontented with the status quo. They want situations and conditions that are worsening people’s lives to be fixed, but they distrust the government to address social ills effectively. In particular, they expressed no trust at all in government’s ability to address key societal issues like poverty (33%), race and culture (32%) and student loans (30%).<sup>17</sup>

In an early 2016 study, Independent Sector conducted extensive, bipartisan polling of voters across the country, including two voter focus groups – one in person and one online – as well as a national phone survey of 1,300 voters (800 nationwide and 500 in electoral battleground states). They found that millennials overwhelmingly agreed with the statement, “The federal government should be doing more to engage the charitable sector to help address economic and social challenges in order to produce more effective and efficient solutions to problems.”<sup>18</sup>

Currently, millennials are also impatient with bipartisanship and politicking – a major reason they are developing their own ways to inspire and effect public policy change.<sup>19</sup>

One way this likely will have long-term implications is by not aligning themselves, at least publicly, with a political party. This behavior could significantly alter the traditional political landscape. We will continue to monitor how politicians at every level of government respond to the generation’s desire to solve ingrained social and environmental challenges, as well as how the faces and priorities of those politicians evolve as a reflection of the generation.

<sup>17</sup> MIR 2016

<sup>18</sup> Independent Sector. 2016. *United for Charity: How Americans Trust and Value the Charitable Sector*. Washington, DC: Independent Sector.

<sup>19</sup> MIR 2016



## I How Millennials Take Action

Millennials have learned that they are most effective when they band together, so they engage their personal connections and build networks that allow them to support multiple causes through a variety of avenues.

Millennials grew up to embrace a focus on doing good, far more than any other generation in history. They also grew up with social media, messaging, texting and a myriad of apps.

Nicole Hicks, director of youth initiatives for the American Cancer Society, remarked on how this has changed their attitudes: "I think the way the world is connected now has made a significant impact on the way millennials give and engage. It's made the world smaller, and it's made visible things that maybe they didn't even see or know about before."

As a result, millennials have created a connected environment in which they engage with each other to do good, without much fanfare. It's their first line of cause involvement and the first chance for them to see how their actions influence change.

"The social tools at [their] disposal ... It's tough to overstate what a game changer that has been," said Eric Asche of the Truth Initiative.

## I Millennials Are Sector Agnostic

Millennials' loyalty to causes rather than to institutions opens them up to involvement via any number of platforms and organizations they believe are working toward the same goal. Michael Smith, executive director of My Brother's Keeper Alliance, reiterated that what may appear to be fractured attention is actually just a new form of engagement.

"I think this is a socially engaged generation. I think they want to give back; they want to do good, and they want to show up. But they don't have this obligation to 'pull the lever' just because somebody died for them to [be able to do so]. I think it's more, 'I can do good in a million different ways. If I'm not inspired by this, I'm not showing up,'" he said.

As everyday do-gooders, millennials can be inspired to engage by point-of-sale requests for donations to food banks, by a peer's request to join a fundraising team, by a suggestion they buy only from socially responsible brands, etc. They consider a company's cause record when applying for employment, and they participate in employee giving campaigns based on the cause rather than the employer. Despite their mistrust in government and their belief that the country is headed in the wrong direction, they still willingly contact their political representatives and vote.<sup>20</sup>

Because of technology and their immersion in social media, millennials hear about causes from any number of friends, acquaintances and friends of friends, besides online news outlets and vehicles like Reddit and WhatsApp. This becomes a smorgasbord of outlets for their passion to help others, making social ills the world over more visible and accessible than ever before.

## Millennials Take an Innovative Approach to Creating Change

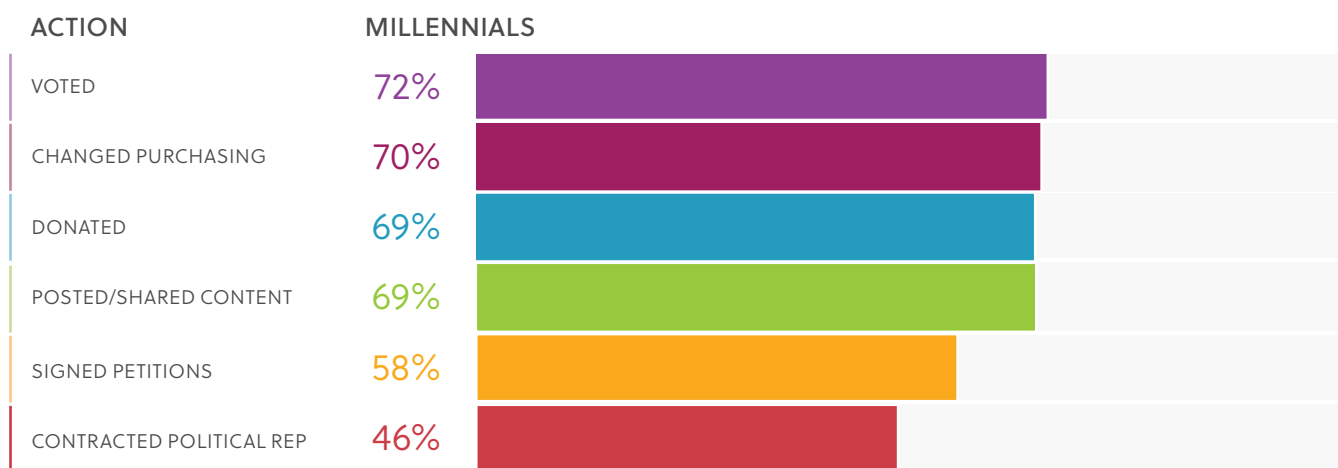
Traditionally, nonprofits have compartmentalized supporters into two camps: volunteers and donors/potential donors. Millennials cannot be so easily categorized.

Consistent with their belief that every asset is of equal value, millennials adjust their cause behaviors based on the issue, the opportunity they're given to engage, and the political, economic and social climates at the time.

For example, a millennial may prefer to vote rather than protest on one social issue; in another, they may prefer to act individually today, then gather for marches and company boycotts tomorrow. Surrounding the 2016 presidential election, for example, voting became the dominant engagement behavior – a behavior that does not indicate they are a donor or a volunteer.<sup>21</sup>

A 2017 survey asked millennials to list the actions they had taken recently in support of a cause or social interest. Giving ranked third, while volunteering did not appear among the top six. Instead, they had chosen to act with their feet, wallets and social media accounts.<sup>22</sup>

### Actions Taken in Support of Causes/Social Issues of Interest<sup>23</sup>



Whatever ways millennials show their support for a cause, 81% are confident that those actions will lead to improvements. In interviews conducted for this report, interviewees indicated a belief that this generation's aggregate engagement is already making an impact. Some of their comments:

- "The more people that participate in these actions, the stronger our collective voice is on issues we care about."
- "Locally, we've seen policies and attitudes change as we become more vocal and organize actions."
- "When we engage others and build a network of effecting change together, we are more likely to influence policy or raise awareness about particular issues."



## I Millennials Believe All Actions Matter – Big and Small

In the traditional ladder of engagement model, organizations focused on moving supporters from passive to active participation. Expecting millennials to act this way, however, is a mistake.

Millennials have engaged in causes back and forth across a spectrum – some remain at the micro level of involvement, some move to leadership roles and many move within the space in between. One significant, unique notion supported by 10 years of research is that millennials acting in small ways individually often create leverage as a large, active group capable of influencing great change.

Causes should consider developing new types of activities that take advantage of this group's propensity to form networks to lead them to heavier engagement.

Millennials are giving, but not yet in high dollar amounts, as a rule. As discussed earlier, they consider every asset they have to offer a cause as equal in value. This necessitates a brand-new approach to donor cultivation by practitioners, one organized around the way these constituents view themselves and their contributions. Departments within an organization must consistently work together to create opportunities for engagement, and managers must ensure an environment of teamwork rather than competition for these individuals.





## | What Influences Millennials to Act

No other person, entity or media outlet can match the power of a millennial's peers as a source of information and opinion adaptation; though politics can play a role in shaping cause engagement.

It is no surprise that the millennial generation is frequently represented with a cell phone in their hand – they're the most digitally connected generation to come of age. That digitally native quality means millennials have grown accustomed to a constant connection to information, media, friends and other peers. These connections also open them up to influence from many different sources.

While the breadth and impact of these influences are still being explored, we do know that the number-one influence on millennial engagement with causes comes from their peers, which has been proven over many years. In 2016 and 2017 we investigated the influence of an election cycle, a changing administration and a current political environment. We found that the innate willingness of millennials to engage on behalf of others was triggered when they believed, for example, that the civil rights of some were being challenged.





## Peer Influence Is Key to Millennial Engagement

A millennial is far more likely to become involved if their peers are already there. This influence has been evident throughout the decade of research. The chart below shows data that reflects a consistent preference for cause engagement with peers.

**Peer-to-peer engagement**, including that which occurs in the workplace, is a critical influence on and vehicle through which millennials charitably give and volunteer.<sup>24</sup>

**FIVE-YEAR DATA SUPPORTING THIS FINDING** (Note: Because each sample of participants is unique to that year's national representative sample of millennials and questions were not designed for longitudinal comparison, it is impossible to compare line items from one year to the next.)

**2011**

52% gave charitably because of a friend or peer endorsement  
61% prefer to volunteer with family and friends, 56% with an organized group

**2012**

64% helped raise money by spreading the word about the organization's work  
84% called on friends, 80% on family and 49% on co-workers when fundraising for an organization

**2013**

56% volunteered to maximize their social connections  
75% liked, retweeted or shared a nonprofit's social media content  
46% preferred asking people to donate to a designated nonprofit's social media content  
45% were not afraid to ask family and friends for money when they felt strongly about a cause

**2014**  
(employees)

87% volunteered to maximize their social connections  
77% liked, retweeted or shared a nonprofit's social media content  
44% preferred asking people to donate to a designated nonprofit's social media content  
47% were not afraid to ask family and friends for money when they felt strongly about a cause  
54% of female and 45% of male employees gave to charity through a workplace campaign

**2015**  
(employees)

22% gave in response to employer solicitations in the past year  
48% have donated to a workplace campaign in their lifetime  
50% have volunteered for a company-sponsored initiative at some point in their career  
45% of employees said some of their past year's volunteer time was through company offered or promoted opportunities  
14% participated in workplace volunteering because a peer or co-worker asked  
46% were more likely to make a donation and 65% to volunteer if a co-worker asked and/or participated  
27% would be more likely to make a donation and 44% to volunteer if a supervisor participated  
21% would be more likely to donate if a CEO asked them

The influence of peers holds true even on the job: In 2014, 77% of millennial employees preferred to volunteer with groups of co-workers, rather than do cause work on their own. Also, they are far more likely to volunteer if their peers participate (65%) than if a manager does (44%). The same is true for company giving programs: Almost twice as many millennials are more likely to donate to a cause if a co-worker asks them than if a supervisor does; the fewest would give if the CEO or a top-ranking executive asked. (Co-worker relationships also influence long-term happiness at work. Bonding with co-workers is one of the biggest factors that keep millennials at their jobs for more than three years.)<sup>25</sup>



44%

of millennial employees said they were more likely to volunteer if their supervisor participated



65%

were more likely to volunteer if their co-workers participated.

Not only do millennials want to engage together; they want to think together. They value peers' opinions and turn to them first for information. As interviewee Simon Moss, co-founder and managing director of campaigns at Global Citizen, alluded to, today's 24-hour news cycle and the easy, immediate access to information has put millennials on a far different path for gathering data than previous generations.

"To engage millennials, causes have to be much more emotional, much more authentic," Moss said. "What we're seeing is that they don't much care about straight-up news reporting. They want the opinion mixed in; as active consumers of media, they will decide what they think. And a lot of their reaction is just as much, 'What do I think about the messenger and the issue?' as it is, 'What do I think about the message?'"

# WHAT CAUSES CAN DO

## I Get to Know Your Constituents

To stay relevant, organizations can forge more rewarding relationships by viewing younger constituents' involvement as being of equal value and worthy of equal attention, no matter what shape their contributions take. Marketers and fundraising staff who continue to think within tried-and-true parameters risk alienating younger audiences and missing opportunities to engage them for the future.

### Steps practitioners can take:

- ✓ **Encourage Small Acts of Participation**  
Most young people's first cause action is typically small, whether liking a social media post, signing a petition or sharing a message. Continuing the conversation after this initial interaction is vital to keeping them invested (and at higher levels) as time goes on.
- ✓ **Promote Action to Strengthen Belief**  
Once an individual has expressed interest in your social cause through a small act of participation, prompt them to engage further through another action right away. Giving an individual an active role in your cause will reinforce their belief in and establish a deeper connection to that cause. Rather than acting impulsively to support you, they will be acting with purpose and contributing to the public discourse. Remember to share their impact.
- ✓ **Fine-Tune Employee Giving Programs**  
Employers must realize that a) the longer a millennial is with the company, the more likely they are to give instead of volunteer, b) millennials are most influenced by their work peers and immediate managers, and c) millennial employees are motivated by competition. Using these facts and the recommendations above, build your company giving programs accordingly.
- ✓ **Create Easier Entry**  
Causes and nonprofits can pick up on natural changemaker tendencies to turn everyday doing-good actions into bigger movements with broader impact on issues that matter to millennials. By lowering the barrier to entry – helping people register to vote or get to the polls, holding educational sessions about impact investing – you can start to make real change snowball.





"I don't think I am an activist ... I've always been very averse to protesting an issue. I'd rather help organize the protest than participate in it. But for me, activism doesn't have to be marching in the streets. ... I can [be an activist] with what I do professionally and in my volunteering life."

– Millennial survey respondent, 2017

## I Keep Up with Their Interests and Concerns

A key theme underscoring the topics and issues that elicit the greatest attention from millennials is the human connection. Whether through their networks, the individuals working on causes or being witness to challenges facing others, organizations must replace transactional interactions with deeper relationship building and look beyond partisan divides to the core issues.

### Steps practitioners can take:

- ✓ **Tell a Story**  
People relate most to a social issue when humans are at the core of the story. Inspire others to pay attention to your social issue by invoking empathy for another. If a millennial can relate to your cause because they see themselves or someone they know as potentially affected by it, they are more likely to act for good.
- ✓ **Demonstrate Added Value**  
Overtly demonstrate your added value – how an individual can most effectively be part of a solution by working *through* your organization rather than on their own. To do this, causes must create opportunities designed specifically for what millennials want to get out of their cause involvement.
- ✓ **Boldly Share Views**  
Causes and companies cannot be shy about sharing their stance on important causes/social issues and what they're doing to advance progress. Remember to focus on how millennials make the work possible because of millennials like them and their participation in the organization's efforts– *in all the ways they engage*. Share stories of individuals whose lives have improved through the organization's efforts. Get to know millennials who are active locally, and take a personal approach to giving them a platform to share their voice. Nationally, articulate the power of the collective voice to solve society's challenges.
- ✓ **Collaborate Across the Aisle When Appropriate**  
Millennials, frustrated with partisanship, want to see people and organizations working together. Talk about partnerships and collaborations in which you are involved that further their mission.



## I Understand How They Participate in Causes

Millennials have demonstrated that they are not interested in being limited by traditional labels of cause engagement. Their nontraditional approach is reflected in their willingness to work on causes with groups from any sector or industry. Organizers can also engage millennials along a spectrum between small and large actions in support of different causes.

### Steps practitioners can take:



#### **Creative Partnerships**

Create partnerships across sectors to find this young audience and get them involved. Partnerships can help position an organization as innovative and collaborative. Partners can help a cause create new engagement opportunities, open up new audiences, make additional promotion possible, bring resources to a project and more.

Starbucks, for example, has vowed to remove plastic straws from their locations globally by 2020; relevant causes could pursue a partnership that could help Starbucks show the cause and the impact to gain supporters. A brand could partner with a nonprofit to distribute reusable shopping bags and involve local producers in some sort of event.



#### **Multiply Activities**

Practitioners must design campaigns that enable an individual to take action in many ways, rather than in just one traditional or untraditional way. Think about modeling campaigns that lend one's voice, network, money, etc., in support of an issue.



#### **Make the Ask**

Do not neglect to ask millennials to get involved. The ask must be delivered through the audience's information channels and must offer a range of authentic engagement opportunities that will allow participants to see they are doing good by working through the organization. Include millennials in decision-making positions on committees and boards.

## I Identify What Influences Their Behavior

The speed of information will only continue to accelerate, and, like millennials, future generations will likely continue to feel accustomed to seamlessly accessing this information through smart devices. This information holds the power to influence; however, year after year, we've seen the influence of peers as a key factor when deciding to take action. We believe that accessing these peer networks will be an important factor for driving cause participation.

### Steps practitioners can take:



#### **Design Deliberately**

Offer advocacy opportunities more thoughtfully and deliberately, with millennials' strong peer-to-peer networks in mind. When they learn about your cause from their friends, make sure they'll learn about you, too. Monitor and contribute to these digital conversations – not with a heavy “here we are” message, but as a provider of facts and context. Then create engagements that involve peer groups: Volunteer opportunities. Events. Fundraising (online and off). Committees. Task forces. Building things. Think innovatively!



#### **Reinforce Support Through Peer Recognition**

Acknowledgment, peer recognition and the pleasure of joining strengthen an individual's belief in an issue. It follows the ideal that *if everyone around you believes in the same cause you do, it must be important*. This is especially true with millennials, who rely so much on their peers for information and opinions. Consider recognition via social media, especially.

# CONCLUSION

Though this report looks back over a decade of studying millennials, it is only a snapshot of the generation. The oldest millennials are reaching midlife and the youngest are entering adulthood, and at every stage this generation is blazing new trails in how society will look, think, work and help each other.

As events occur, challenges and opportunities arise, new technologies launch and old ways of thinking fade, this demographic will respond thoughtfully and with passion.

Doing good and challenging the status quo has been an important proposition for every generation, and the notion thrives with millennials. After 10 years we have developed a framework to continue learning about young generations, using the profile of millennials as an initial step in this ongoing work.

Through our research, we can say that millennials are attempting to interact with causes in new ways – ways that don't fit the traditional cause structure. In most causes, departments and positions are built around constituent involvement: volunteer coordinator, corporate donor manager, major gift director, membership manager, annual fund department and more. Many still keep development functions separate from marketing and communications functions.

How will you structure outreach functions for millennial constituents? Where will millennials see themselves? And what happens when there's a disconnect?

Millennials are using a communal approach to engage friends, family and work colleagues to address what they see as core issues the world needs to address. They don't want to be categorized as an annual fund donor or an event volunteer. They have traits that will take them to another cause or organization if they don't feel you are interested in an authentic relationship, where you value all of their assets equally.

Just as millennials are using tools and methods that are unfamiliar, as boomers did before them, they are using the tools of the era. We can assume this trend will continue, meaning future generations will use new technology and methods of communication with or without your organization, because they will believe in the power of these tools to facilitate social change required to create better lives for people. And from what we know, young people are willing to work passionately for the change they believe in through their own channels, if necessary.

Let's ensure it's not necessary. Let's adapt so we can help shape these remarkable young people into sharp, effective tools for our causes.

# SUMMARIES: THE MILLENNIAL IMPACT PROJECT

The Millennial Impact Project is the largest body of data and analysis on how U.S. millennials interact with causes; in aggregate, the project's reports cover behaviors and preferences of more than 150,000 millennials. The *Millennial Impact Report* series has become one of the most trusted sources of research on millennials and causes, helping organizations, corporations and individuals everywhere understand the best approaches to interest and involvement with this generation.

## *2008 Social Citizens: A Look at the Unique Characteristics of Millennials and Their Impact on Civic Engagement*

The Case Foundation researched millennial actions and attitudes related to civic engagement. Researchers also looked at and challenged some of the millennial stereotypes of the time and exposed facts about their communication styles, such as via online communities, tribes and bubbles – little known to the outside world then, but becoming increasingly relevant today. The Foundation concluded that millennials were “social citizens representing a nascent model and era of citizen participation that combines idealism, digital fluency and immersion in social causes.”

**Key Takeaway: Millennials are merging the lines between for-profit and nonprofit structures and concepts.**

## *2008 – 2009 The Millennial Impact Project*

Achieve, with the support of the Case Foundation, began conducting and publishing research dedicated to understanding the dynamic between causes and a millennial cohort of potential donors and activists.

**Key Takeaway: The Millennial generation's sheer size demands researchers' attention.**

## *2010 and 2011 Millennial Donors Survey and Report*

The initial Millennial Donor Survey (2010) and Millennial Donors Report (2011) revealed that donors in the up-and-coming generation were generous people who, though they appreciated and were highly involved with technology, made their philanthropic decisions based more on personal connections than digital ones.

**Key Takeaway: Millennial donors want to know their gifts will make a difference.**

## *2012 Millennial Impact Report*

Research for the 2012 report found more evidence supporting the giving approaches in the prior study, along with new indications that this otherwise progressive generation had some traditional notions. Most notably, trust played a huge role in their giving decisions, and they were more likely to volunteer for organizations if they had already donated to them.

**Key Takeaway: Millennials want to get involved and support causes they care about.**

## *2013 Millennial Impact Report*

In 2013, researchers focused on how nonprofits might fully invest in the millennial generation by diving deeper into the influence of peer engagement and fundraising design/messaging. Data revealed millennials were interested in the people and issues organizations benefit rather than in the institutions themselves, which so often is the focus of nonprofit messaging.

**Key Takeaway: Millennials first support causes they are passionate about (rather than institutions).**

## *2014 Millennial Impact Report: How Millennials Connect, Give and Get Involved With the Issues That Matter to Them*

As companies increasingly relied on corporate social responsibility programs to inspire recruitment, retention and productivity, they partnered with nonprofits in greater numbers. This research focused on millennials' workplace preferences – how they engaged with employers and what they looked for in corporate cause work.

**Key Takeaway: Millennials consider a company's cause work when they make job decisions.**

## *2015 Millennial Impact Report: Cause, Influence and the Next Generation Workforce*

Building on the examination of employee workplace preferences the year before, 2015 research sought to pinpoint who and what influences young employees to become actively involved in company cause work.

**Key Takeaway: Millennial employees are motivated to engage through competition among departments/co-workers and are influenced by their managers' and co-workers' giving.**

## *2016 Cause, Influence and the Workplace: The Millennial Impact Report Retrospective: Five Years of Trends*

This five-year retrospective applied findings from half a decade of research to a comprehensive understanding of millennial interests, engagements and motivations as they related to cause work, whether by giving, volunteering, social media sharing, activism, employment or voting in a national election.

**Key Takeaway: As millennials age, they move from slight interest to activism, fueled by a passion for doing good that is inherent in their sense of self.**

## *2016 Millennial Impact Report*

How would an event as large as a U.S. presidential election affect millennials' philanthropic involvement? Researchers found that social causes outweighed political ideologies, parties and candidates in decision making. The number of millennials moving into a giving and change making lifestyle, separate from traditional forms of engagement, was swelling.

**Key Takeaway: Millennials believe they hold more power and the will to create change than nonprofits.**

## *2017 Millennial Impact Report – Final Report: An Invigorated Generation for Causes and Social Issues*

2017 research sought to determine whether or not the 2016 presidential election would influence millennial engagement with social causes and, if so, how.

**Key Takeaway: Millennials do not agree with the direction the country is going, and they are ready to take action and use their voice to create the change they want to see.**

"Millennials are craving to feel connected to the social purpose of their companies, but if their peers and direct supervisors aren't supportive, millennials may not have the encouragement they need to actually participate."

– Ryan Scott, quoted in *The Huffington Post*, 2015

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# METHODOLOGY

Research for *Understanding How Millennials Engage with Causes and Social Issues: Insights from Ten Years of Research Working in Partnership with Young Americans on Causes Today and in the Future* consisted primarily of secondary data analysis from published Millennial Impact Project reports. To add current insights, researchers also used a nonrandom quantitative method (survey) and qualitative method (interviews of fundraising practitioners who have applied *Millennial Impact Report* research).

## Phase 1: Interviews

- › Interviewed individuals who were involved with the development of *Social Citizens* and individuals who have been involved with organizations that mobilize millennials.
- › Interviews took place during February, March and April 2018.
- › Interviewers asked about:
  - › individual's role with the *Social Citizens* report or working with millennials in cause engagement work,
  - › what interviewee thought about "social citizen" label being applied to millennials,
  - › why interviewee believed millennials were involved in causes,
  - › the values interviewee saw in millennials as they were beginning and continuing to engage with causes,
  - › how interviewee has witnessed millennials, shaping of cause engagement,
  - › how interviewee believes millennials will be remembered for their influence on cause engagement.

## 10-Year Retrospective Research Questions Phase 2: Survey

- › Surveyed current and past Millennial Impact Project research downloaders and users, and those having a role in millennial cause engagement.
- › N=254 respondents\*
- › Survey fielded from 04/09/2018 to 04/29/2018
- › Survey inquired about:
  - › respondents' top causes/social issues of interest,
  - › actions respondents took on behalf of causes of interest ,
  - › voting,
  - › identifying key words that describe millennials, cause engagement in the current climate,
  - › how respondent believes millennials have influenced cause engagement,
  - › how respondent believes millennials will be remembered for their influence on cause engagement.

## 10-Year Retrospective Research Questions

The research team was guided by the following questions:

1. How has millennial engagement with causes changed during the past 10 years?
2. What have been the influences on and motivations for millennial cause engagement during the past 10 years?
3. How have millennials influenced the roles of other social citizens?

\*Historically, more women than men have participated in Millennial Impact research.

# THANKS TO THE INTERVIEWEES WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THIS REPORT

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Allison Fine	Author, <i>Social Citizens</i> report
Nicole Hicks	Director, youth initiatives, American Cancer Society
Simon Moss	Co-founder and managing director, campaigns, Global Citizen
Steven Olikara	Founding president, Millennial Action Project
Kari Saratovsky	Principal, Third Plateau Social Impact Strategies; former vice president, social innovation, Case Foundation
Maya Enista Smith	Executive director, Born This Way Foundation
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THE  
MILLENNIAL  
IMPACT REPORT

The Millennial Impact Project

Find this and more research on millennials  
and causes at [themillennialimpact.com](http://themillennialimpact.com)



**FINAL 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