

The Importance of the Next Generation and Why They Matter to You

chapter
ONE

The world demands the qualities of youth. Not a time of life, but a state of mind.

—Robert F. Kennedy

How do you define young alumni engagement?”

Derrick posed this question to the president of a mid-size university with more than fifteen thousand alumni between the ages of twenty and thirty-three. The president spoke for fifteen minutes, but her response came down to this: “We want our young alumni to be present. To be a part of the university community on and off campus—to be here and show pride, to be dedicated to their alma mater, and to assist us in making the institution better for the long term.”

Great sound bites, to be sure, but they didn’t really answer the question. This was the answer you might hear in the boardroom if a trustee asked about the importance of young alumni engagement. It’s an answer we hear all too often from institutions that have probably not been proactive in their efforts to truly engage Millennials. Derrick wasn’t satisfied. So he followed the president’s answer with a much more direct question: “How do you *know* the university is connecting personally with young alumni?”

This was a critical moment. Not because Derrick was trying to trick the president of this very well-established institution, but because he was

trying to understand the foundation for relationships that existed to engage their Millennial constituents. Derrick recognized this could go a number of different ways; this was the time when a leader could be honest with herself about the lack of engagement, or instead spend time talking about her alumni relations efforts that on the outside seemed to be working just fine but in reality were hiding the truth—that her institution had become more disconnected from their alumni than ever before.

Indeed, most leaders would have delved into lengthy monologues about how they are using email, social media, and other highly interactive social solutions because they know (or at least believe) that those methods are the silver bullet to engaging the next generation. But this president chose another route. She was smart and humble. She understood that the institution was not living up to its potential, and she knew they weren't taking full advantage of or institutionalizing the changes necessary to build toward a better future.

Her next comment helped Derrick understand the position that leaders in the nonprofit sector currently take about the Millennial generation. The president said, "Quite frankly, I don't know, and I don't think I should be expected to know the specific ways of engaging this generation.

"That is why you are here," she added, half-kidding. "Jokes aside, it is important. We cannot deny that these constituents and alumni will lead this university in the future. We cannot deny the job we have today as administrators to engage them now so the faculty and staff thirty years from now can reap the benefits of our hard work in making those personal connections.

"However, you are asking me to put aside capital needs, declines in state funding, growing demands from my trustees, and major donors with higher capacity to give—in order to spend time getting one young alumnus involved? I hope you can appreciate the delicate position I am in and the work I must do to lead this institution.

"So I ask you now: how can I spend my time and what can I do to engage this generation and help my staff and trustees understand the importance of personal connections so we can make this institution stand out and attract greater levels of young alumni engagement?"

Her statement captures the major reason why so many nonprofits fail to allocate the resources and spend the time necessary to engage Millennials. The leadership of organizations throughout this country conceptually understands why they need to engage Millennials; however, these concepts are not translating

into action. Even though Millennials are the next generation of donors and constituents, leaders spend far more resources focused on maintaining their existing supporters rather than trying to cultivate new ones—so much so, that they cannot see beyond their current donor strategies and systems to a future where those supporters are no longer around.

This book is for the president of that university. It's for the CEO of a national nonprofit, and for the board of directors of a small community-based organization who will take a proactive approach to generational engagement rather than assuming a one-size-fits-all approach that works only for today's donors and not tomorrow's. It's for nonprofit managers who are trying to understand what drives and motivates Millennials to give, take action, and develop as leaders, so that in the future their organizations can be positioned for success. It's for the lead fundraiser and chief marketing officer who are trying to make tough decisions on a daily basis about how to engage the Millennial generation today.

Lastly, this book is for the organizational leader who is responsible for creating and championing a new movement internally to engage the next generation of constituents—the person who must tackle constant external and internal forces that impede progress in generational engagement, all in the name of return on investment (ROI).

WHO IS THIS MILLENNIAL YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT?

Let's face it: generations are complex, and dividing people into distinct categories based on birth year is an inexact science. Author Don Tapscott used the term “Net Generation” in 2008 to categorize the group born between 1977 and 1997; the trade magazine *Advertising Age* is credited with concocting the term “Gen Y” in a 1993 editorial.

William Strauss and Neil Howe first used the term “Millennial” in their book *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069*, published in 1991.¹ The authors didn't coin the term; rather, in a democratic fashion, they conducted a poll in which members of the generation themselves started to use the term to define their traits and characteristics. After publication, the term went on to gain widespread attention and general acceptance.

That said, not everyone who uses the label agrees on exactly when the generation began and ended. The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) uses the birth years 1984–2004, whereas the Pew Research

Center—which undertook a major study on the Millennial generation in 2009—uses birth years 1980–2001. The New Politics Institute and the Center for American Progress, on the other hand, suggest an earlier start, with the first Millennials born in 1978. Suffice it to say, there has been no shortage of labels to define the generation that we will refer to as Millennials throughout the book.

Putting names, labels, and years aside, we can all agree on the basic facts. As shown in Figure 1.1, the Millennial generation is the largest and most diverse generation yet, and right now they’re in the middle of the “coming of age” phase of their lifecycle. The oldest members are in their early thirties; the youngest are going through their adolescence.

When Pew Research first set out to study the emerging generation in 2009, they already knew a few big things about the Millennials:

- They are the most ethnically and racially diverse cohort of youth in the nation’s history. Among those ages thirteen to twenty-nine, 18.5 percent are Hispanic; 14.2 percent are black; 4.3 percent are Asian; 3.2 percent are mixed race or other; and 59.8 percent, a record low, are white.
- They are starting out as the most politically progressive age group in modern history. In the 2008 election, Millennials voted for Barack Obama over John McCain by 66 percent to 32 percent, whereas adults ages thirty and over split their votes 50 percent to 49 percent. In the four decades since the development of Election Day exit polling, this was the largest gap ever seen in a presidential election between the votes of those under and over age thirty.
- They are the first generation in human history who regard behaviors like tweeting and texting, along with websites like Facebook, YouTube, Google, and Wikipedia, not as astonishing innovations of the digital era but as everyday parts of their social lives and their search for understanding.
- They are the least religiously observant youths since survey research began charting religious behavior.
- They are more inclined to trust in institutions than were either of their two predecessor generations—the Gen X-ers (who are now ages thirty to forty-five) and Baby Boomers (now ages forty-six to sixty-four)—did when they were coming of age.

Because of this diversity, it is difficult to make sweeping generalities about every member within the ninety-two-million strong cohort. To fully understand the traits

Figure 1.1
Four Generations in the Workplace

<p>Millennials 1980–2001</p>	<p>Current U.S. Residents Census Bureau Estimate</p> <p>92 million</p>	<p>Key Historical Events</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Columbine High School shootings • September 11 terrorist attacks • Enron and other corporate scandals • Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq • Hurricane Katrina 	<p>Traits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entitled • Optimistic • Civic minded • Close parental involvement • Values work-life balance • Impatient • Multitasking • Team oriented
<p>Gen X-ers 1965–1979</p>	<p>Current U.S. Residents Census Bureau Estimate</p> <p>62 million</p>	<p>Key Historical Events</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AIDS epidemic • Space Shuttle Challenger catastrophe • Fall of the Berlin Wall • Oklahoma City bombing • Bill Clinton–Monica Lewinsky scandal 	<p>Traits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-reliant • Adaptable • Cynical • Distrusts authority • Resourceful • Entrepreneurial • Technology savvy
<p>Baby Boomers 1946–1964</p>	<p>Current U.S. Residents Census Bureau Estimate</p> <p>78.3 million</p>	<p>Key Historical Events</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vietnam War • Assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. • First man on the moon • Kent State killings • Watergate 	<p>Traits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workaholic • Idealistic • Competitive • Loyal • Materialistic • Seeks personal fulfillment • Values titles and the corner office
<p>Traditionalists 1925–1945</p>	<p>Current U.S. Residents Census Bureau Estimate</p> <p>38.6 million</p>	<p>Key Historical Events</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great Depression • Pearl Harbor • World War II • Korean War • Cold War Era • Cuban missile crisis 	<p>Traits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patriotic • Dependable • Conformist • Respects authority • Rigid • Socially and financially conservative • Solid work ethic

Source: Ron Alsop, *The Trophy Kids Grow Up: How the Millennial Generation Is Shaking Up the Workplace* (Jossey Bass, 2008).

and characteristics of Millennials, one must also examine the environment in which they have grown up.

The vast majority of Millennials were born during a time when radical advances in technology were taking place. Those on the older end of the Millennial spectrum couldn't wait to boot up their Apple II and learn about history through computer games like *Oregon Trail*. By the time these older Millennials were in junior high and high school, the high-pitched, static-y sound emanating from their computers in the early days of dial-up was music to their ears, as were three simple words: "You've got mail."

For younger members of the Millennial generation, the idea of having to dial up to access the Internet is a foreign concept. Technology simply was always present. These individuals are in fact "digital natives." Although certain technological advances did occur in their lifetime, this generation has consistently been surrounded by a world in which technology was seamlessly interwoven with their daily lives. This is why we are seeing the generation adapt to technology more quickly than older generations—and why organizations must begin to get ahead of the game when it comes to these digital solutions, as we will discuss in the chapters that follow.

Although it's easy to point to technological advancements as the defining element of the Millennial generation, their understanding of and connection to cultural and world affairs is also remarkable. They are global citizens. What's more, they've grown up with high levels of tolerance; they support gay marriage, take racial and gender equality as givens, and have a generally open and positive attitude toward immigration. (After all, more than 40 percent of the Millennial generation are themselves minorities.)

Although not all will be able to remember when the Berlin Wall fell or when the Space Shuttle *Challenger* exploded shortly after takeoff, they did grow up when the tensions in the Middle East were high, the terrorism witnessed in the United States on September 11, 2001, remained an ongoing threat, and natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina and the earthquake in Haiti helped further define the ways they give and involve themselves in nonprofit work, as well as their ideologies and behaviors toward community change.

That's not to say these events didn't also impact other generations; they did. But the point in Millennials' lives when these events took place—their formative years—means they had a different result. Each took place at a time when Millennials were old enough to be aware and young enough to be shaped by

their impact, to the point of becoming drivers of social and cultural change. We will examine how this generation has been a catalyst for change and what their impact has been on society through these recent events as well as their tendencies for everything from purchasing behaviors to use of technology.

Millennials also grew up with another important aspect when it comes to serving their communities: formal requirements that upon graduating from high school they will have completed a certain amount of hours of service to their community before walking the stage. Long-term, immersive, intensive service programs such as AmeriCorps and Peace Corps were heavily marketed and promoted to Millennials from the time they were in grade school. Given that structures for both long-term and episodic volunteering have always been present for them, Millennials' emphasis on community service and their interest in changing the world is not surprising. We'll explore this in greater detail in Chapter Four.

A Historic Election

The 2008 election not only marked the election of America's first African American president, but also saw the political emergence of a new, large, and dynamic generation. Millennial experts Michael Hais and Morley Winograd predict that this event will contribute to the realignment of American politics over the course of the next forty years.²

Their unified support for the first-term senator from Illinois, combined with high voter turnout rates, made the Millennial generation a decisive force in Obama's victory. Young voters accounted for about seven million of Obama's almost nine-million-vote margin over John McCain. What made the Obama campaign so successful with Millennials? Beyond the candidate's youthful energy and relevance to younger demographics, the campaign had several key ingredients that can be translated across nonprofits and other institutions developing engagement strategies and campaigns.

Messaging

"Together we can make a difference." This sentence was the spark of a joining movement fueled by Millennials. Barack Obama's team created messaging and a platform that forged a personal connection with Millennials who were seeking to join a movement for change. Phrases like "Yes we can" and the simplicity of words like *hope* and *change* resonated with a generation keenly interested in helping create a new government based on openness and support—ideals ingrained in the Millennial makeup.

(Continued)

Digital Media

The campaign's online organizing team—led by Chris Hughes (cofounder of Facebook and a Millennial himself) and the team at Blue State Digital, the agency of record for the campaign—also capitalized on one important aspect to send those important messages: digital media. Because the majority of Millennials could hardly remember a world without the Internet, the Obama team created strategies that brought together the likes of social media, informal communications, and ongoing impulsivity to inspire Millennials to give in the moment. The creation of the platform My.BarackObama.com was optimized for Millennial appeal. The campaign understood the Millennial generation's desire to interact with brands, so they positioned their candidate as a brand all on his own. The Obama campaign was able to further capitalize on this by creating a platform focused on the pronoun "my," thus giving ownership to a generation eager to find and use their voice to connect with others who shared their passion and commitment.

The site also showed a shift in customer relationship management (CRM) to a *customer-managed* relationship, in which young people could be in control of their relationship with the candidate. They were able to customize and personalize their pages, engage in discussions, post photos, and use many other interactive elements. The digital strategy team came up with other unique techniques and gimmicks, even tweeting from the @barackobama twitter account that Obama would announce "the VP candidate sometime between now & the Convention by txt msg & email."

Conversation Creation

The communications team was able to take their message, wrap it in conversational dialogue, and help every single Millennial understand that Obama was going to help them personally achieve their dreams. That ability to speak directly to Millennials created a new wave of online activists inspiring each other to join the movement on behalf of Obama. Millennials were given peer online messages that would help them communicate quickly, to the point, and informally with their friends, leading to the viral campaigning that made the Obama election effort so memorable in social media history.

What's more, Millennials were not just encouraging their peers to go out and vote; they were also shifting the conversation for their parents and grandparents as well. Efforts sprang up outside the official campaign, such as The Great Schlep (a reference to the Yiddish word for a long, arduous journey)—conceived of by Ari Wallach and Mik Moore to mobilize Jewish Millennials to head down to visit their grandparents in Florida, educate them about Obama, and in turn swing the Florida vote in his favor. The campaign reached out to others as well: "Don't have grandparents in Florida? Not Jewish? No problem! You can still become a Schlepper and make change happen in 2008, simply by talking to your relatives about Obama."³

GENERATIONAL GENERALITIES—BRING 'EM ON!

Just like all generations that have come before, the Millennial generation has attracted plenty of stereotypes. Some are fitting; others may not accurately define the whole group. Though much has been written on this generation's defining traits, we thought it was important to focus on a few key characteristics that will help your organization better understand how to engage with this complicated and constantly evolving demographic and ultimately convert them into supporters and champions for your cause. We devote more attention to each of them in the chapters that follow, but offer the following to set the stage.

Digitally Connected

Millennials have grown up in the age of the twenty-four-hour news cycle, giving them access to news and world events at the touch of a button. They are connected to technology and in particular through social media platforms that help them stay connected to their networks of family and friends—often through real-time updates, tweets, and texts that offer a glimpse into the current status of their lives. Although this concept of being digitally connected at all times is somewhat foreign to those in older demographics and may even come off as self-absorbed or out of touch with reality, it is simply a mode of expression for the majority of today's young people.

However, even with Millennials' wide adoption of these tools, we know that digital engagement with friends and family does not always translate to engagement with nonprofit causes. That's why an organization's use of digital and social media tactics will require additional support and engagement beyond simple posts and mass messages. For nonprofits seeking to engage Millennials in peer strategies for volunteerism and giving, potential opportunity exists through digital connections, but they can be challenging if the organization expects virality or the message lacks the necessary components to inspire conversation.

Creative

Millennials are creative when it comes to design and thinking. They enjoy spending time bringing creativity to a project or problem, and they revel in the chance to create a new way to present information, communicate an issue, or tell friends about a new brand or product. In fact, the emergence of new approaches to creativity and design thinking has led to the development of entire undergraduate and graduate school programs focused on the topic. The concepts of effective design—generally associated with successful consumer goods such as

clothing, cars, furniture, and product packaging—can also be used to creatively address social problems by applying new approaches and techniques. Nonprofits can take this creative approach to help individuals in a given community understand how to actively engage in the cause's work.

Solution-Centered

Millennials want to create and develop new solutions to social issues, and utilize their networks for creative problem solving. As they have watched government and the private sector fail in solving some of the most pressing issues of our time, Millennials are standing at the ready and in many cases developing their own unique approaches to social problems. We'll share the stories of Millennials who are doing so by leveraging what makes their generation unique: collaborative styles of leadership, comfort and ease of use with technology, and transparency, to name a few traits. Millennials are keen to understand issues' complexities and then work toward addressing them. And regardless of how big a challenge may be, they are excited to be a part of a solution rather than sit on the sidelines.

This is where nonprofits can really work closely with Millennials through problem-solving and solution-based approaches. Harnessing the energy and excitement may be difficult, but creating those tangible milestones is important. We see this happen often in fundraising practices when organizations provide tangible gifting opportunities (for example, \$10 will buy a net in Africa to help prevent the spread of malaria for one family). This model helps Millennials get involved in clear, easy, and impulsive ways.

Self-Organized

Millennials bring together other Millennials. They respond to friend requests, family calls for assistance, and peers in need. Through informal networks and groups, Millennials can come together and create a movement for change or even a small interest group. We'll refer to these activators as "free agents," a term adopted by social media mavens Beth Kanter and Allison Fine in their book *The Networked Nonprofit* to describe the individuals working behind the scenes or on social media platforms to help spread messages and build connections between an organization and its potential supporters.⁴

Self-organizing allows for small groups to help the organizations they care about in an informal setting that is not governed or programmed by the organization. The challenge is to let self-organization happen without impeding the

dynamics of the group in the interest of your cause. This natural networking and connected trait of Millennials should be encouraged by organizations. Those who open themselves up to the idea of working with self-organizers and are able to get it right have an opportunity to be a resource for smaller groups so they can have a deeper impact on the cause.

Open and Transparent

Millennials thrive on knowing exactly where they stand in their relationships at all times. Whether in the workplace or with friends and family, their relationships are transparent and open, and they relish the opportunity for feedback on how they are doing.

What's more, Millennials want and even expect to be able to access information quickly and seamlessly, and this access includes the ability to pick up the phone to directly address a decision maker or person of authority. This transparent behavior translates to their community involvement. They want to know where the money is going, how it is going to be spent, and what specific stories of impact the nonprofit can share. Nonprofits that lack transparent behavior will have a hard time engaging Millennials who seek open relationships with the organizations they choose to support with time and financial resources.

Nonprofits can achieve such transparency in the form of information, data, stats, and updates on the health and current capacity of the organization. Online transparency can also be created in social media networks such as Facebook where authentic conversations can inspire trust and relationship building. Organizations must think about their offline transparency as well, which includes discussing the true state of affairs at special events, discussing the needs of the organization at volunteer activities, and helping donors understand where their dollars can go.

Although this generation has many other traits, the ones we just highlighted represent the most dominant aspects of the Millennial generation as they engage with nonprofit organizations. When we think about Millennials and their interests in changing the world, we must capitalize on the traits that make them unique and can best help the causes they want to support.

SELF-ORGANIZING CAME LONG BEFORE THE INTERNET

Although the concept of self-organizing may seem to have taken shape during the twenty-first century with the rise of the Internet and the explosion of radical

new social technologies that have allowed individuals (many of whom we will profile in the chapters that follow) to build their own social movements, we need to go all the way back to the early nineteenth century to appreciate its origins.

At that time, the burgeoning of loose associations led people to come together in more deliberate ways. Citizens began self-organizing into structured institutions and associations that are now largely referred to, as a group, as the nonprofit sector. It was common for a committed group of caring citizens who shared an interest in helping one another deal with a cause, a problem in the community, or an issue affecting their families to get together and support each other through time and financial resources. These informal groups later formed larger, more formalized structures to do their work in the community. Staff began to take the roles of volunteers, specialists performed marketing, and fundraising became the sole function of certain employees.

Perhaps the easiest and most traditional way of thinking about the nonprofit sector is as one of three concentric circles like that of a Venn diagram, the other two circles being government and the private sector. Each overlapping circle has its own distinct programmatic functions, its own tax structures, and its own way of operating. However, in recent years we have seen the lines on that diagram blur. There are no longer hard and fast rules dictating that “doing good” and solving social problems can happen only through the structure and confines of nonprofit organizations.

When you think about it, today’s nonprofits are able to create complex structures for earned revenue, governments are investing large sums of money in entrepreneurship and social innovation, and businesses care about their environmental footprint and have created entire departments focused on corporate social responsibility. Each example shows how the once distinct three-sector structure is blending.

Alexis de Tocqueville, a famous early observer of nonprofits, wrote in his book *Democracy in America*: “If men are to remain civilized or to become so, the art of associating together must grow and improve in the same ratio in which the equality of conditions increased.”⁵ We’ve watched over the past several decades as the nonprofit sector has experienced phenomenal growth in nearly every imaginable and measurable way. As the sector is becoming bigger, more diverse, and more organized, it’s also come under higher levels of scrutiny. Sector leaders are becoming more professional, more confident, and more involved in public policy than in previous decades. Likewise, we’ve watched as government support of nonprofits has made them more top-down and bureaucratic.

In 2011, nonprofit organizations provided some 10.7 million American workers with employment, making it the third largest sector of our economy, just behind retail trade (14.5 million) and manufacturing (11.5 million). And even during the recent recession years, nonprofits have created jobs while the rest of the economy has shed them. The Johns Hopkins Nonprofit Economic Data Project shows that in the past three decades alone, nonprofits have grown to account for a substantial part of the U.S. economy and by some estimates for as much as 10 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

That's the good news. The not-so-good news? With the rapid growth of nonprofits and the creation of hundreds of thousands of individual organizations competing for the limited dollars of funders and the limited attention spans of individuals, it's becoming more and more difficult to keep up and maintain these organizations, each of whom have their own staffs, missions, and operating costs. Although we know that institutions are necessary to focus efforts, provide institutional memory for communities, and champion issues for the underserved and underrepresented, they will need to look, feel, and operate quite differently from what they are accustomed to in order to authentically engage the voice, support, and eventually the dollars of Millennials.

WHY ORGANIZATIONS NEED TO ADAPT NOW

As nonprofit organizations began to grow, thrive, and receive major funding from both the government and private foundations over the course of the twentieth century, they also began formalizing their processes and taking on more hierarchical structures. Nonprofits were becoming more businesslike and institutional—just as individuals were becoming more wary of institutions.

Today these organizations are working to gain broad community support. They are building lasting change in the communities they serve through various forms of human and financial capital. Still, fundamental to their existence and growth is the role of individuals in the community—the key ingredient for community transformation.

As the individual becomes more central and important to the work of nonprofits, nonprofits must better understand and appreciate the complexity and changing nature of their constituents. The shifting demographics of constituents and donors are already beginning to have a major impact on the ability of nonprofits to attract, retain, and inspire the engagement of the next generation.

But these changes may not be entirely what you expect. Ignore the generation now, and you do so at your own peril. Making the choice now to engage with Millennials means you are taking the necessary steps to begin securing the future of your organization. Otherwise, you'll need to catch up in the years to come.

Although Millennials are friending, following, tweeting, and texting more than any other constituent base, new and emerging social technology is only part of the equation. As we'll discuss in the chapters that follow, what drives Millennials even more than technology and social media are the personal relationships and human connections they forge along the way. It's up to an organization to realign in a way that enables connected and fosters real-time, authentic relationships.

Organizations also need to understand and appreciate the demands being placed on the Millennial generation, all of whom are coming of age during a difficult period for our country and our world. Today's rising generation is faced with mounting levels of school debt and the realities of finding a job in a down economy. With so many external factors affecting their daily lives, it should come as little surprise that they may not place your cause or social issue at the top of their priority list. Even so, that doesn't mean you should turn away. Instead, find unique ways to engage them on their terms; by investing them in your issue now, you can help shape how they respond in the future.

There's also a financial reason your organization should focus on the Millennial generation: they have \$300 billion in spending power, and of that, \$62.7 billion is considered discretionary. Moreover, Millennials are the beneficiaries of a \$41 trillion transfer of wealth from older generations.

All this means that Millennials are looking for areas and opportunities to spend their dollars, whether that be a new product or a social cause. This means a real opportunity to take advantage of resources potentially available to your organization. This cohort of twenty-somethings will be leading, guiding, and deciding the fates of organizations in the decades to come, and their spending decisions will benefit those organizations that have done the best job securing their familial and individual interests now.

Dvorit Mausner, a Millennial generational fundraiser for the Penn Fund at the University of Pennsylvania, put it this way when she addressed her volunteer leadership:

If there is an expectation that this generation of alumni will be supporters, active alumni in sharing our need to raise financial

resources, and bring in other alumni to support our next capital campaign, engaging the young alumni of the Millennial generation is not an option but a necessity. We should not expect that young alumni, in their efforts to become involved with the institution, should start their relationship by giving first. We should expect that we would need to spend time with them in advance of our campaigns to help them understand the results of giving to the Penn Fund and how their contributions truly make a difference to our institution. Again, we must do that now, otherwise we will suffer in future campaigns.⁶

IS THERE A TRADEOFF?

The challenges facing nonprofit leaders in this current economic climate are astounding, and leaders of social causes are being called on to lead in very uncertain times. They need to build their constituency base, expand their financial contributions, and create an infrastructure for long-term sustainability—a combination of requirements that calls for leaders experienced in both constituent engagement and business operations.

However, should you build those long-term sustainable solutions at the cost of engaging a new generation of activists, supporters, and leaders? Not at all. Organizations that have focused less of their time on including this generation are impeding their own efforts to make that sustainable future a reality.

Indeed, when creating any new strategy or goal, organizations should incorporate into their thinking early on the concept that Millennials are part of the solution and execution rather than the product in itself. Consider the for-profit example of Facebook, which follows a “social by design” mantra to keep social engagement at the core of all its solutions, marketing efforts, and communication strategies. This means that as we move forward and toward a more people-centric Web, successful businesses will effectively leverage social connections and place great value on the ability and ease of sharing and amplifying a message.

With this in mind, perhaps nonprofits should consider a “Millennials by design” focus, incorporating Millennial traits, thinking, and work into their strategies from the beginning. During planning meetings, creative sessions, and other forms of strategic decision making, organizations should involve

Millennial thinking and engagement in getting the end results. In short, they should move beyond simple constituent engagement and surround the concepts of strategy with Millennial actions.

It is not either/or, but rather and. How do you fundraise for an organization *and* engage Millennials as advocates to help it succeed? How do you increase the effectiveness of your program outreach *and* involve Millennials in developing the program? How do you get some of the smartest leaders in the community to join you in re-envisioning your institution *and* include the voice of the Millennial generation in those discussions?

ARE YOU READY?

You may be ready. In fact, we hope that's why you're reading this book. But not every organization is ready to focus on Millennial engagement. If your organization needs to raise short-term cash quick, then spend your time and effort creating a new business model. If you lack a presence online, if you don't have the human capital necessary to pick up the phone and discuss the organization with new constituents, or if you devote less than 5 percent of your time to stewardship and cultivation of constituents, then Millennial engagement programs are probably not your best fit right now.

What organizations need to do first and foremost is show that they are open. This is not about being open-minded, although that is important. It is about opening your organization up to a generation eager to involve themselves in creating solutions to the challenges you face. It is about engaging in transparent behaviors with your community to help constituents, donors, and volunteers understand how you operate, how you generate money, and how you have the impact you do with their help. It is about being open to others' working on your behalf and about releasing the control that has prevented your organization from creating a true personal connection with an outside constituent. The Millennial generation feeds on openness. If you are not willing to be open, a Millennial engagement program is not for you.

THE MILLENNIAL ENGAGEMENT PLATFORM

There is an answer to the university president's question about how to engage Millennials. It resides in a new Millennial Engagement Platform designed specifically for this generation, consisting of the following cultural and operational

components that organizations need in order to build an effective engagement program:

- *Leadership Inviting*: Provide access to organizational leaders and enable Millennials to take an active role in the development of their own leadership skills.
- *Tangible Transparency*: Exercise transparency in all that you do, and provide Millennials with the ability to access information, from how your organization affects the community to how you make and spend money.
- *Social Connectivity*: Develop engagement platforms that use distribution, connections, and messaging that are social in nature and allow for greater discourse and discussion both on- and offline.
- *Solution-Inspired Environment*: Create an environment in which Millennials can build solutions to challenges, own those solutions, and then execute strategies that fulfill those solutions. Millennials draw inspiration from creative design and solution-oriented thinking, not from already completed plans that they are expected to merely follow.

This type of platform requires cross-departmental institutional involvement. Throughout the book, we will explore how to implement such a platform in an organization. This type of engagement also requires ongoing resources and time devoted to make it successful. Without either of the two (resources and time), almost all Millennial engagement programs are destined for failure.

THE SILVER BULLET

We all want the silver bullet, but then we are reminded there's no such thing. Today's Millennials are constantly evolving, and with these changes comes competition between local and national issues and platforms vying for their attention. Though many organizations have tried to replicate a strong strategy from one organization and apply it to another, there is no "one size fits all" solution. And for every young professional group that has launched from a nonprofit, another one now sits as a binder on the shelf labeled, "Nice ideas that didn't work."

Although we won't claim to deliver you the silver bullet, we do have some guiding principles that can help you get closer to developing a strategy that resonates. It's a concept we like to use with organizations in conjunction with the just-described components of the Millennial Engagement Platform. It's how you

BUILD the Millennial platform, and we will walk you through it in more detail in Chapter Two:

Be unified as an organization in working with this generation.

Understand the complexities of this generation's environment.

Identify those seeking to make a difference.

Lead through engagement rather than participation.

Determine what Millennial success looks like to your organization.

In this book we will explore each of the Millennial engagement components and incorporate the concept of BUILD. We will show examples of great Millennial engagement programs and hear directly from Millennials and leaders of organizations working together for change in their community. We will discuss the role of technology, networks, and social capital—all strong influences of this generation. By the end you will understand how you can create your own platform and build a program to reach a generation yearning for social change.

Change will not happen overnight, but building awareness and opening yourself and your organization up to these new approaches is a necessary first step in creating institutions better prepared and equipped to compete for the Millennial generation's attention and passion. Your organization's future leadership expects you to act, and they are depending on your success navigating the new and evolving world of Millennials. We hope to make your journey a little easier.