



Engaging the Next Generation of Donors:

A Comparative Look at Giving Behaviors

October 2025



Introduction

In the next 25 years, an estimated \$124 trillion will be transferred across generations, with about \$85 trillion anticipated to pass specifically to Millennials and Gen Z – who are currently under age 45.

As this historic transfer of wealth unfolds, younger generations will have substantially more influence in shaping the future of philanthropy, making it increasingly important to understand the giving behaviors and preferences of these donors. To explore key insights on engaging the next generation of philanthropists, CCS Fundraising has conducted a survey that seeks to compare giving patterns across age groups.

Objectives of this report include:

- 1 Deliver original insights drawn directly from donor survey responses, highlighting generational differences in giving behaviors between Millennials and Gen Z (under 45) and Baby Boomers and Gen X (over 45).
- 2 Analyze emerging trends in philanthropy to identify actionable strategies for nonprofits to more effectively engage younger donors and foster long-term relationships.
- 3 Equip nonprofit leaders with data-informed recommendations to adapt fundraising approaches, enhance donor communications, and strengthen messaging that resonates across age groups.

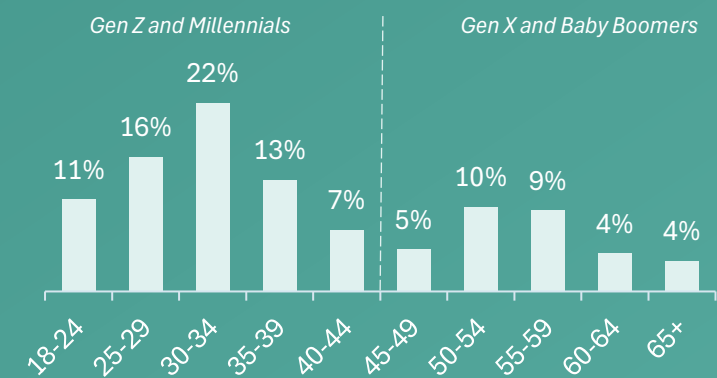
Please note, survey respondents primarily represent broad-based and mid-level donors (making gifts under \$5,000). As a reference point for high-net-worth givers, *UBS Family Advisory and Philanthropy Services* found that 68% of billionaire “next gens” aim to keep growing their parents’ impact achievements, whether from philanthropy or financial investment, and the *National Center for Family Philanthropy* found that 86% of family foundations are encouraging their next generations of family members to participate in the family philanthropy.

For more information about the data or insights of this report, please contact Meghan Davison at MDavison@ccsfundraising.com.

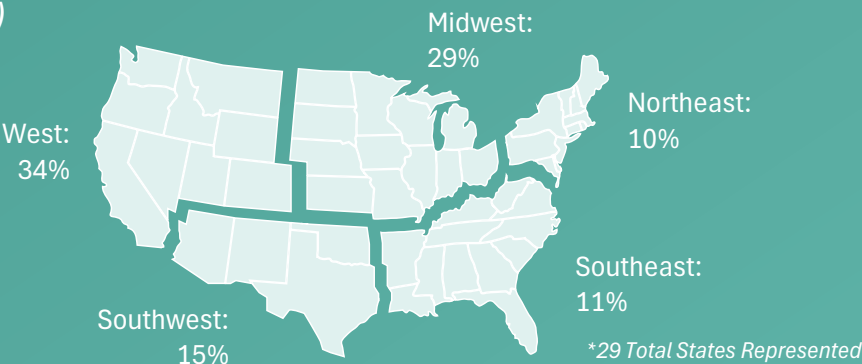
Introduction

CCS Fundraising conducted a survey on donor behaviors and motivations between July 15th – September 15th, 2025. We received 227 responses across a range of demographics. Please find the demographic breakdown of survey respondents below.

Age



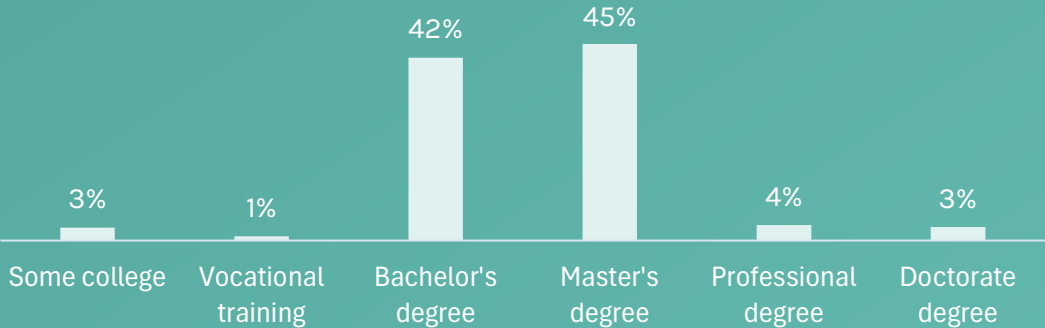
State of Residence (By Region)



Annual Household Income

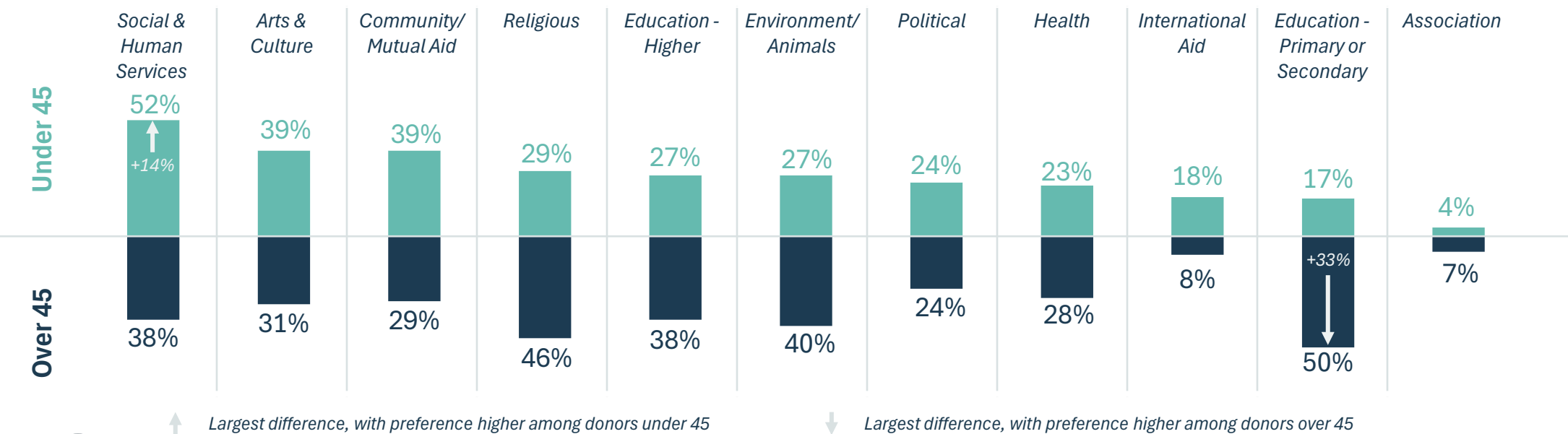


Educational Background



*0 respondents with no formal education, some school/no diploma, or high school graduate/equivalent.

1. To which sectors do you give? Choose all that apply.

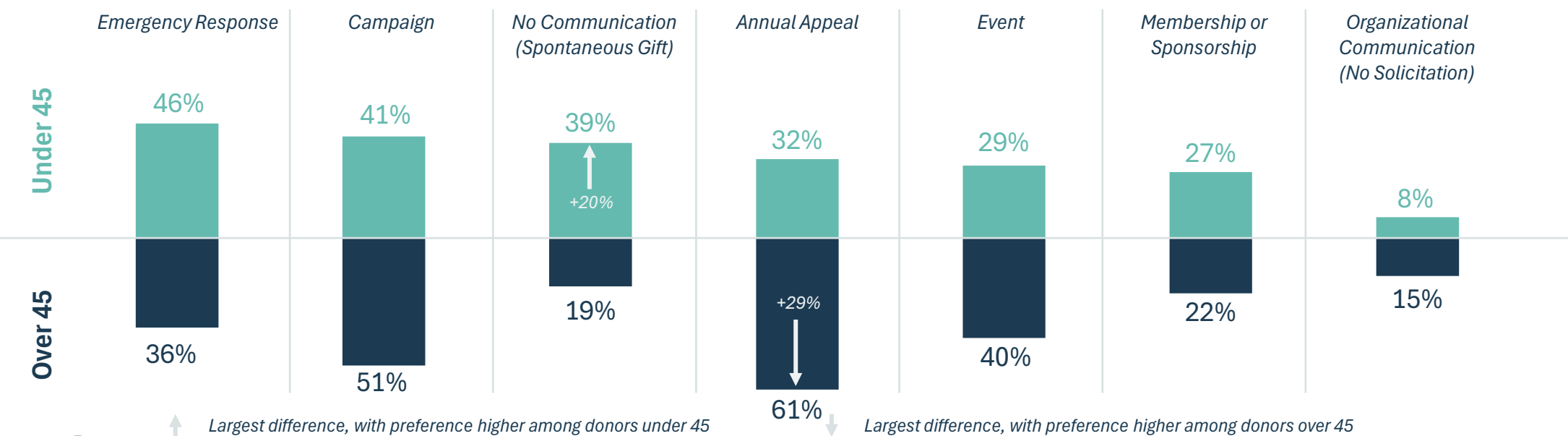


Key Insights

Donors under 45 show a higher preference for giving to organizations in social & human services, community/mutual aid, and international aid sectors by a margin of greater than 10%. These sectors often respond to urgent needs such as food insecurity, housing instability, and global crises — indicating that younger donors are more responsive to **immediacy and impact** than those over 45. Across sectors, younger donors may resonate with calls to action emphasizing immediate needs. **Consider messaging around current events to tap into their responsiveness.**

Donors over 45 demonstrate a higher preference for giving to education (primary, secondary, and higher), religious, environmental/animal welfare organizations by a margin of greater than 10%. These sectors are often perceived as **community pillars and long-term investments in societal development**. These donors may be more responsive to messaging that positions organizations as **trusted institutions with a long-term vision and deep community roots**.

2. To what type of call to action do you give? Choose all that apply.

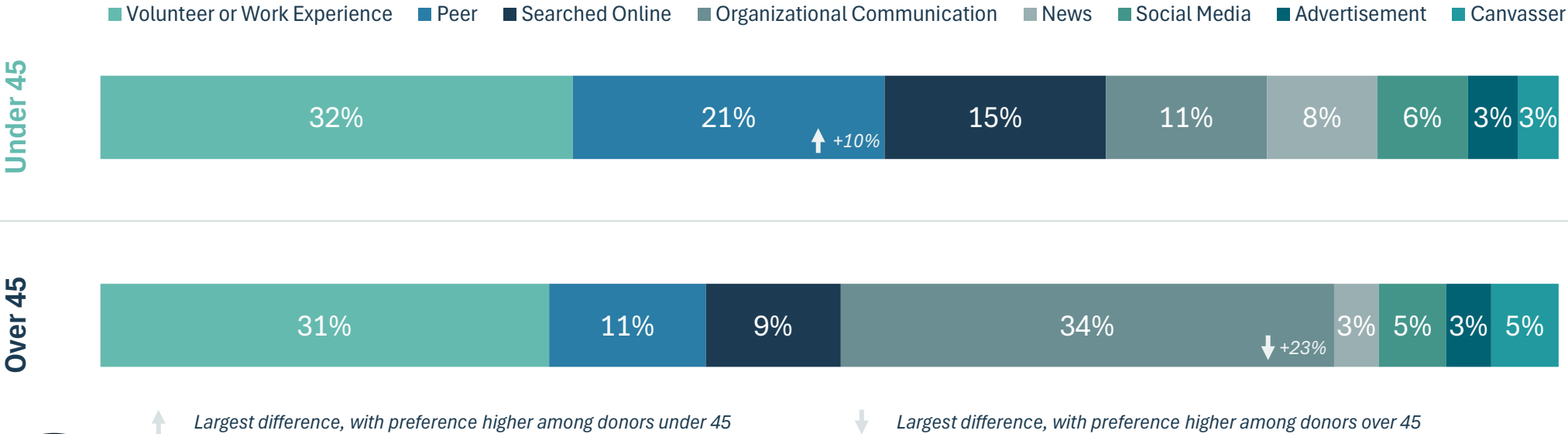


Key Insights

Younger donors are more likely to **give spontaneously**, either without direct solicitation or in response to disaster relief efforts. This behavior emphasizes the need for nonprofits to **maintain high visibility and trust** so that when these donors feel compelled to act, they instinctively know which organizations are credible and impactful. Organizations that cultivate a **strong community presence, consistently communicate real-world impact, and build a reputation for responsiveness** are more likely to attract spontaneous gifts. To retain donors who make spontaneous gifts, consider introducing low-barrier entry points like monthly giving at small amounts to build long-term relationships.

Donors over 45, in contrast, respond more often to **structured calls to action** such as campaigns and annual appeals. This giving behavior aligns with traditional fundraising cycles, **indicating influence from consistent, strategic communication that builds toward a clear call to action**. Consider communication strategies and tailored messaging by age group to improve donor engagement and conversion rates. Newsletters, impact reports, and donor spotlights may be segmented by donor personas (i.e. legacy vs. urgency) that advance towards an ask.

3. How did you discover the most recent organization you gave to?



Key Insights

As donor bases continue to shrink year-over-year, donor acquisition remains a critical priority for nonprofits. Donors under 45 are significantly more influenced by their peers, indicating a need to **empower peer-to-peer advocacy**. Consider how to equip existing supporters to share the work and mission of the organization with their networks. This may include shareable **community events or volunteer opportunities** - especially given the high discovery rates through these types of activity - and **challenges to share messaging** through circulating links or posting on social media.

Donors over 45 are more likely to respond to **direct organizational outreach, indicating higher institutional trust**. To attract donors from this segment, consider strategic communications that seek to **target new donors with a high affinity for the organization's mission**. To note, donors under 45 give to 2.5 organizations annually, while donors over 45 give to 5.1 organizations annually on average. This suggests that younger donors may still be exploring their philanthropic identity and are open to discovering new causes. Survey respondents over 45 were more likely to indicate a range in the number of organizations they contribute to yearly, calling out that their contributions to new organizations depend on which organizations communicate need in a given year.

4. What motivates you to give? Choose all that apply.

Under 45

Over 45



Key Insights

Across age groups, donors are largely aligned in which factors are most motivating. Above all, values were the highest motivator, suggesting that donors are highly influenced by **personal relevance and connection to the cause**. Tax incentives, memberships, and other benefits are less influential. This indicates that nonprofits should move beyond transactional giving and focus on deepening relationships by **highlighting shared values and tangible impact**.

To identify key motivators among an organization’s donor base, consider implementing **A/B testing**. This approach allows for comparison of messaging impact on performance, and data can be used to segment donor groups.

5. When considering the organization you support the most, which statement most closely reflects your views?

Under 45

“I am a strong supporter of a cause and give to any organization that I feel is making a meaningful impact in that area.”

“I am a loyal supporter of an organization because of their reputation and/or my connection to the organization.”



Over 45



Key Insights

While both age groups were primarily split across views on personal support, donors under 45 are slightly more likely to view themselves as supporters of a cause, while donors over 45 are slightly more likely to view themselves as supporters of an organization.

For those motivated by impact and alignment with a cause, not necessarily loyalty to a specific organization, **lead with impact and highlight measurable outcomes** that were directly influenced by a donor’s support. With these donors, it may also be meaningful to position the organization’s work within the ecosystem of the cause area, **calling for action as part of a larger movement**.

For those motivated by trust, personal connection, and organizational reputation, **emphasize organizational history, leadership, and long-term impact**. To build relationships among this group, **treat donors as insiders**; offer exclusive content and tailor messaging to the donor’s history with the organization.

6. What is the most meaningful to you for building a relationship with a nonprofit?



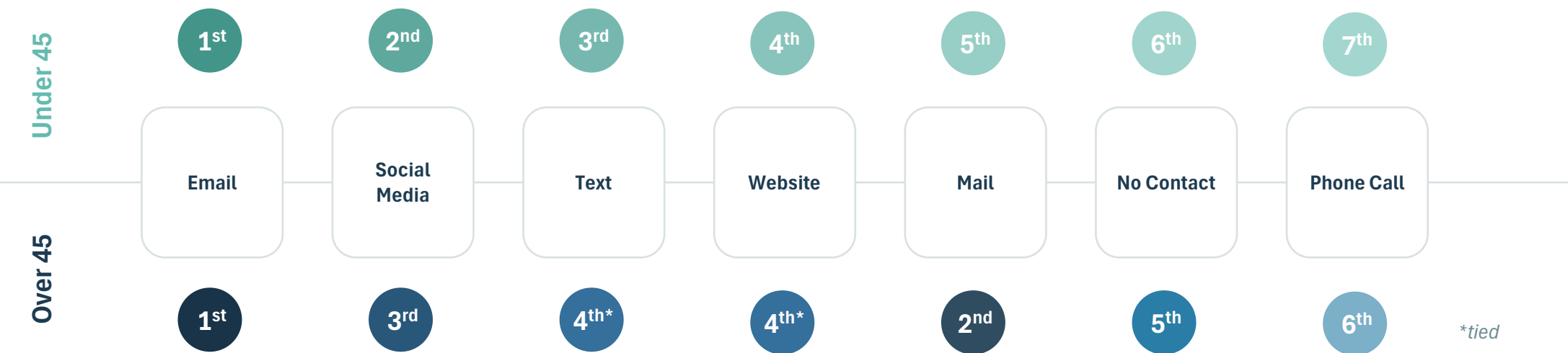
Key Insights

Donors are most highly motivated by organizational storytelling and impact data, with donors under 45 indicating a preference for personal narratives, and donors over 45 finding clear data most meaningful. Though there are noted preferences, both factors are important in crafting compelling messaging – **consider where storytelling and data can be paired together to appeal to donors across demographics.**

Emotionally resonant storytelling shares firsthand accounts from beneficiaries, as well as other stakeholders like volunteers and frontline staff. In communications, **share transformational journeys that illustrate how donor support makes an impact.** To appeal to younger donors, incorporate peer voices as trusted recommendations to motivate their social circles.

To take a data-driven approach to presenting impact, it is important to **share how funds are allocated along with metrics that quantify meaningful results and progress towards goals.** Multiple donors over 45 specifically called out the need to understand management of their donation in survey comments, indicating that this is a strong influence on trust in an organization.

7. How do you prefer that an organization keeps you updated?

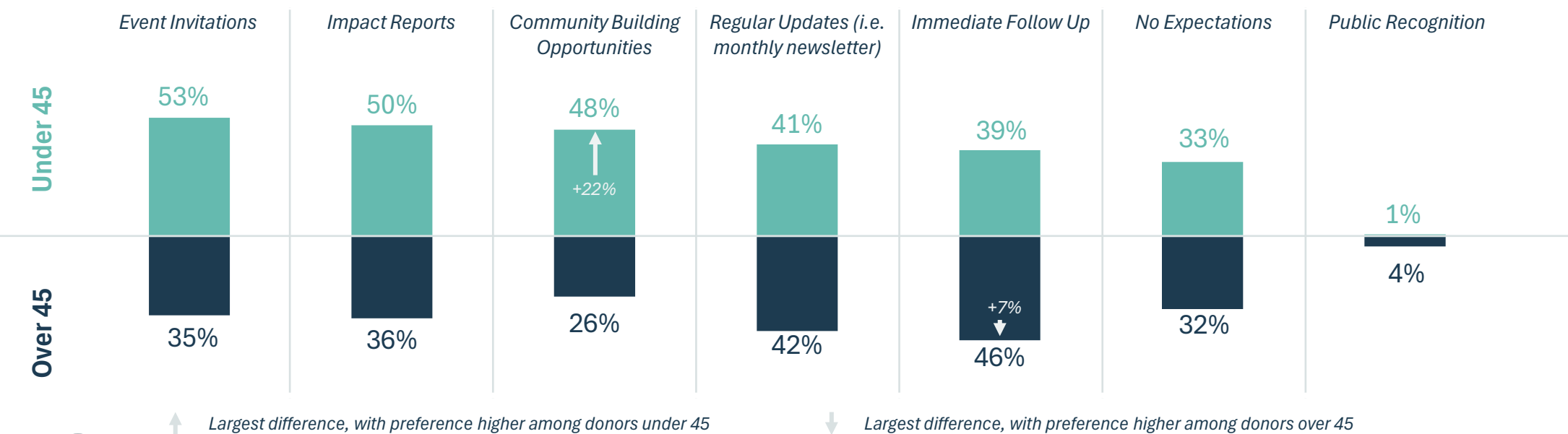


Key Insights

Communication preferences are largely consistent across age groups, with **email being most preferred and phone calls being least preferred**. Many donors would rather not be contacted at all than receive a phone call, indicating a strong aversion to this method. Both age groups show a high preference for receiving updates via **social media**, suggesting that these platforms offer an engagement opportunity beyond core email communications to share regular updates, behind-the-scenes content, and donor spotlights. Text messaging and website updates fall into the middle range of preferences.

A key generational difference is that donors over 45 show a **significantly stronger preference for direct mail** compared to donors under 45, who are less responsive to this format. Incorporate direct mail strategically for important or personalized materials for donors over 45, while also maintaining a digital presence. For younger donors, replace direct mail with digital touchpoints like personal texts, video messages, or interactive emails.

8. What expectations do you have from organizations after you give? Choose all that apply.

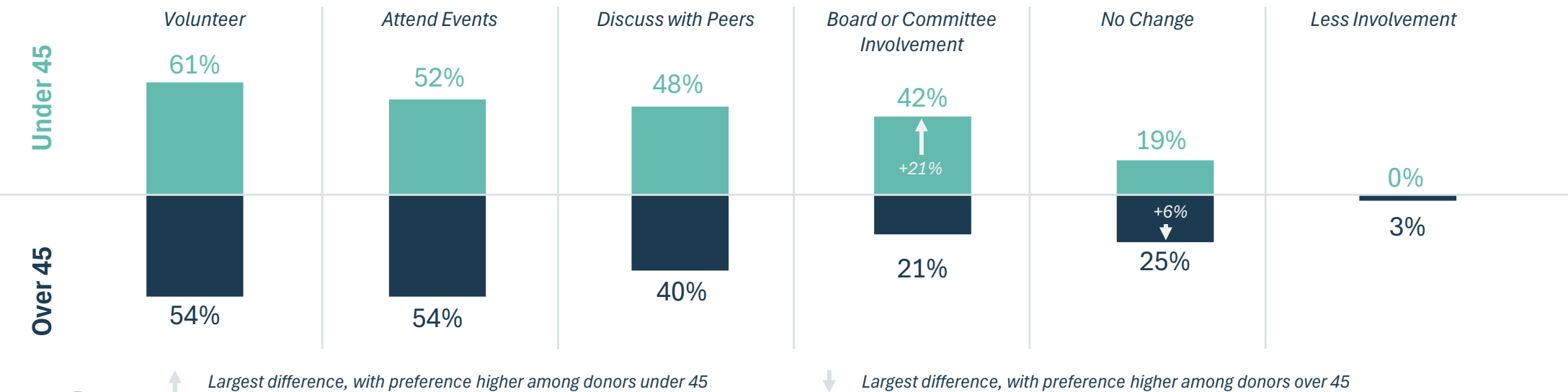


Key Insights

About one-third of survey respondents indicated they have no specific expectations from the organizations they support. Among those who do, preferences for continued engagement vary, with **donors under 45 expressing notably higher expectations**. Younger donors are significantly more interested in community-building opportunities, event invitations, and impact reports, with these preferences ranked more than 10% higher than among donors over 45. **This suggests a desire for ongoing, immersive relationships with organizations.**

In contrast, donors over 45 prioritize immediate follow-up after giving, placing less emphasis on sustained engagement. This may reflect a view that their **financial contribution fulfills their role**, and further involvement is not expected unless prompted by the organization. In follow-up with donors over 45, provide personalized thank-you messages that **include a brief summary of how their donation will be used** to fulfill this group’s desire to have data and financial transparency incorporated into communications.

9. How do you envision your future involvement with the organizations you feel most connected to?
Choose all that apply.



Key Insights

Volunteering and event attendance are highly anticipated across age groups. For organizations aiming to deepen donor relationships, these **touchpoints should be viewed as part of a long-term engagement strategy**, rather than one-time occurrences. Consider how philanthropy might be centered in events and volunteering, empowering development staff to follow up with attendees and invite deeper engagement.

Donors under 45 also indicated a **strong likelihood to discuss organizations with their peers**. This is especially meaningful as peer influence is a strong motivator for organizational support among this age group. Additionally, a notable generational difference is that younger donors express significantly greater interest – over 20% more – in future leadership roles, such as joining a board or committee. This suggests a desire **for deeper involvement and influence, presenting an opportunity for organizations to cultivate long-term champions**. Consider how invitations for leadership in junior boards or young professionals groups might bring supporters closer to the organization.

10. Do you have any other feedback?

Under 45

“One thing I think a lot of nonprofits that I engage with do well is **social media marketing**. I think for a lot of younger people (Gen Z), social media is the way to reach us.”

“**Repeat messaging** and use multiple touch points (such as multiple emails, texts, social posts) around the same thing. I often see an ask for something but don’t take action immediately and will once I’ve thought about it.”

“**Appreciation** for small but consistent giving, more **community involvement** and volunteer opportunities for those who can’t give at high amounts but who want to help.”

“I understand touch points are important, but constant email and texts are overwhelming and shallow. I prefer organizations that try to **build a community or champion a cause.**”

“**Current event** focused marketing (ex: defunding of PBS, NPR) calls to action have been effective for me... “Cup of coffee” or “daily lunch” **comparisons have also engaged me** and put my own spending into perspective.”

“I get all the info I need about the orgs I support from **social media, websites, and email newsletters**; I have no interest in texts, calls, or mail.”

“We give to causes and issues that are important to us, not to organizations or brands. **We don't care which organization solves the issue, we just want it solved.**”

“I think younger audiences don't want to support organizations; **they want to support people**. I'd like to see more input from the communities and people being served.”

10. Do you have any other feedback?

Over 45

"I prefer to see **what impact my donation will make** and specifically what the organization does with the money."

"Send personalized communications that **speak to my personal impact or possible relationships** with your organization."

"Building meaningful community is so important for donors. Events ensure we feel connected - like we are **part of a bigger movement**. I also want to be **aware of what issues are impacting the organization**."

"In a personal manner, tell me what was done that directly helped people with my gift. While storytelling is good, **I prefer data over the overuse of narrative**."

"Be able to **state your case** and be able to answer **where the money is going**."

"Spending money on gifts for donors or trying hard to contact philanthropists feels wasteful to me if people are unresponsive. Instead **use that money to the cause itself**."

"People want to give to organizations that are **doing well and managing their money**. Be transparent and show us how that happens."

"**Personal connection and relationship building** are the highest level of engagement and motivate me to give more."

Summary Donor Profiles

Characteristics of Preferences	Under 45	Over 45
1. Prioritized Cause Areas	Urgency and Impact	Community Investment
2. Call to Action	Spontaneous	Structured
3. Organization Discovery	Peer Influence	Organizational Trust
4. Motivations to Give	Personal Values	Personal Values
5. Support Type	<i>*Split; Slight Lean to “Supporter of Cause”</i>	<i>*Split; Slight Lean to “Supporter of Organization”</i>
6. Relationship Building	Compelled by Storytelling	Data-Driven
7. Communication Preference	Digital Touchpoints	Digital Paired with Physical Touchpoints
8. Continued Engagement	Long-Term Opportunities	Immediate Follow-Up
9. Future Involvement	Active Participants Seeking Leadership	Active Participants
10. Additional Feedback	Driven by Authenticity, Cause, and Community	Driven by Impact, Efficiency, and Personalization

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77

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