

GUIDE FOR FUNDRAISERS AND NONPROFIT LEADERS:

Engaging Women Donors More Effectively

WHY WOMEN'S PHILANTHROPY MATTERS

Engaging women donors is more than just a good strategy; it's essential. Fundraisers and nonprofit leaders are continually seeking better ways to connect with donors, but most strategies still rely on outdated models that overlook gender. The Women's Philanthropy Institute's (WPI's) updated literature review reinforces that women are not only more likely to give, but they also give differently than men. Understanding these distinctions can help you cultivate stronger, longer-lasting relationships with women donors, leading to more consistent support, deeper engagement, and increased organizational impact.

KEY INSIGHTS FROM THE RESEARCH

- **Women give more frequently and spread their giving across more organizations.**
Women tend to be more egalitarian in their philanthropy, favoring multiple causes and broader community impact, rather than concentrating all giving in one place.
- **Women prioritize impact, values, and relationships.**
Women often give based on empathy, social connection, and personal values. Donors, especially women donors, want to understand the "why" behind your work, and how they can be a part of it.
- **Women prefer collaboration and transparency.**
Collaborative giving vehicles, such as giving circles, have high participation rates among women. These donors value shared decision-making, open communication, and long-term engagement.
- **Household giving decisions often involve women as the lead or co-decision-maker.**
Research shows that women play a significant role in household giving decisions, especially for larger gifts. Strategies that only target the "head of household" may miss the mark.
- **Life stage, financial independence, and social networks matter.**
Women's giving behaviors are shaped by their life stages and careers, as well as by peer networks. Engagement strategies should be flexible and responsive to these contextual factors.



WOMEN'S PHILANTHROPY INSTITUTE

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HOW TO APPLY THESE INSIGHTS

- **Focus on relationships, not just revenue.**
Shift from transactional fundraising (one-time donation asks) to relational engagement. Women want to feel connected to your mission, your team, and the people whose lives are impacted by their gifts.
- **Design campaigns with empathy and impact in mind.**
Use storytelling that showcases tangible outcomes and emotional connection. Women donors often respond to evidence of personal impact over abstract metrics.
- **Invite co-creation.**
Create opportunities for donors to shape the direction of your programs, especially in major gifts, giving circles, or donor communities. This shared power model aligns with women's preferences for collaborative giving.
- **Segment donor communications.**
Don't assume all donors are alike. Utilize audience insights to develop content that speaks to women's philanthropic values, motivations, and life experiences.
- **Acknowledge different types of contributions.**
Recognize and celebrate all forms of engagement. Donors support your mission with their dollars, as well as through volunteering, introductions, visibility, and expertise. Women often bring holistic support to the table that goes beyond financial giving alone.

NEXT STEPS FOR FUNDRAISERS AND NONPROFIT LEADERS

- **Audit your messaging and donor journey.** Are you telling impact stories that reflect empathy and how your organization benefits the community? Are women visible in your donor spotlights and materials?
- **Host a listening session or salon.** Invite a group of women donors to share what drives their giving. Use their input to refine your engagement strategies.
- **Build a pipeline of long-term women supporters.** Consider launching a giving circle, women's philanthropy advisory council, or legacy donor program that fosters community and continuity.
- **Explore WPI's *Women Give* series.** Pull specific findings into your development planning and board presentations.
- **Visit the *Proven Practices* website.** Take WPI's self-assessment and get tailored, practical ideas to further engage women donors.

The Women's Philanthropy Institute (WPI) is part of the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. WPI increases understanding of women's philanthropy through rigorous research and education, interpreting and sharing these insights broadly to improve philanthropy.

Learn more at philanthropy.indianapolis.iu.edu/institutes/womens-philanthropy-institute