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Empowering the Next Generation in Family Giving



Early and meaningful engagement is key.

Hemenway & Barnes philanthropic advisors have seen firsthand that one of the most powerful ways to strength and unite families is by engaging the next generation early and meaningfully in a family's philanthropy.

Why does engaging the next generation matter?

Family philanthropy isn't only about deploying financial capital—it's about stewarding values, purpose, and relationships over time and creating shared ownership across generations. Engaging younger family members gives them a voice and a sense of responsibility, helping them understand what is involved and how to make it feel a part of their world.

When next-generation members are invited in as part of a deliberate and well-planned process, they develop financial literacy, governance skills, and a values-based lens for understanding wealth and impact. Families that engage youth early are more likely to see long-term participation, healthier decision-making, and fewer challenges when generational leadership transitions occur. Next-gen members often bring skills families need and want, like digital fluency, new networks, and comfort navigating social change.

Who are the “next gen”, and what do they care about?

“Next gen” typically includes teenagers through young adults—often spanning Gen Z and younger Millennials. This group is diverse in age, experience, and worldview, but there are some consistent themes in what they care about:

- **Equity and Justice:** Many are deeply interested in issues like social justice, racial equity, climate change, mental health, and community-led solutions.
- **Impact:** They want to understand why a cause matters and whether efforts are making a real difference.
- **Engagement beyond the check:** They want to be in relationship with organizations they support, whether that be through volunteering, board service, or advocacy.
- **Transparency:** They value openness about money, power, and decision-making.
- **Learning by doing:** Experiential opportunities resonate more than formal presentations or written background materials.

What are some practical steps to engage next gen youth in your family’s philanthropy?

Engagement doesn’t require giving youth full decision-making authority on day one. The most effective approaches are gradual, relational, and developmentally appropriate. They also do not have to wait until some magical age, and can be implemented with even young children.

- **Start with conversation.**
Create space for youth to explore family values, personal interests, and social issues they care about, without pressure to align immediately with existing priorities.
 - *Have you articulated your motivation for engaging the next generation? Do you discuss current events and how the family’s philanthropy could play a part in doing good in the world? Have you carved out dedicated time during the summer or a family vacation to discuss philanthropy? Have you ever done a values exercise as a family?*

Millennials

Ages 29-44

Born: 1981-1996

Gen Z

Ages 13-28

Born: 1997-2012

- **Offer multiple on-ramps.**

Not everyone will engage in the same way. Options might include site visits to nonprofits, volunteer experiences, next-gen gatherings, or advisory committees.

- *Is the philanthropy "path" clear for the next generation and are roles and responsibilities clearly articulated? Do the next gen members feel equipped with the information they need to join the family's philanthropy?*

- **Give real responsibility.**

Consider allocating a discretionary grantmaking budget, inviting participation in due diligence or grant review, or pairing youth with more seasoned family mentors. Responsibility + Guidance = Confidence.

- *If your family has a Donor Advised Fund, for example, would you consider giving the next gen a pool of funds that they can allocate themselves as a hands-on way to learn about philanthropy?*

- **Create peer connection.**

Next gen members often engage more fully when they can learn alongside siblings and cousins. Dedicated next gen spaces foster belonging and shared identity.

- *If you're part of a multi-branch, multi-generational family, would you consider doing Zoom calls to bring the next gen first and second cousins together to learn about philanthropy, as well as other important topics like trusts, estate planning, budgeting, investing, etc.?*

A final thought...

Philanthropy is a learning journey, a living practice. The key is to be patient and flexible. Life stages will shift; interests will evolve; and engagement will fluctuate. Don't lose sight of the goals of engaging the next generation: building strong family connections and creating positive change in the world.

Questions?

Hemenway & Barnes philanthropic advisors work closely with family groups to design and implement charitable giving strategies. If you are interested in learning more about how to engage with the next generation on philanthropy, please reach out to us. Visit our website or contact the author of this article. [Jessica Coakley, CAP®](#) is a certified 21/64 advisor and works with multi-generational families to provide an array of philanthropic services, including next gen engagement.

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