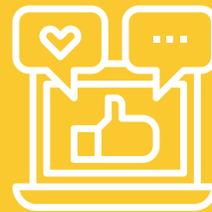


# Donor Experience Study

A deep dive into donor experience and expectations



# A deep dive into **donor** experience and expectations



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# Overview: Why Care About This Study?



The ways in which donors interact with organizations are ever changing, as new giving and engagement opportunities are introduced using evolving technologies. With that, donors are expecting more and more of the nonprofits they support.

As we see donor interactions shifting from in-person to virtual, how can nonprofit organizations maintain the same level of giving and personalized engagement?

We conducted this study to better understand current donor experiences, both in-person and online, to identify areas where nonprofits might improve. We also wanted to look towards the future to better understand how donor preferences and expectations are shifting, in an attempt to help nonprofits engage with supporters moving forward.

## Our research set out to answer four essential questions:

- Are donors' giving preferences shifting, and if so, how?
- Where is the tipping point between offline and online giving preferences?
- What role do experiences play in increasing donor loyalty?
- What level of personalization do donors want?

We hope these findings help nonprofit organizations evaluate their own donor experiences, and attitudinal differences by age and income level, among other factors. This study should serve as a baseline for the shifting expectations of donors, so nonprofits can adjust their strategies to increase donor loyalty and contributions.

Study results are based on a representative United States sample of 1,000 nonprofit donors who donated to at least one nonprofit organization in the past 12 months. The online surveys were conducted by Finn Partners between January 31 and February 5, 2018.

Here's  
what **we**  
found.

# Key Findings

1

**How donors give is driven by donation amount and familiarity with the organization.**

The higher the donation amount, the more likely donors are to contribute offline. Donors also prefer to give offline to unfamiliar organizations.

2

**Age and income determine preference for online giving.**

Younger and higher-income donors are more comfortable giving online, and are far more likely to give higher contributions online.

3

**There's a growing preference for mobile giving.**

Seventy-one percent of donors have donated on a mobile device, with a growing interest among younger donors to make all online donations through a mobile device.

4

**Event experiences impact donations.**

Sixty-three percent of donors say they are more likely to give to an organization after having a positive experience at an event. This is especially true for Millennial and Gen X donors.

5

**Technology can improve fundraising events.**

Experiences with technology at events are overwhelmingly positive, and organizations that leverage technology to enhance the experience at a fundraising event or auction see a positive impact on donor engagement.

6

**Donors want personalized follow-ups.**

More than twice as many donors say they prefer personalized content than say they prefer generic content. All donors are most interested in personalized impact reports.

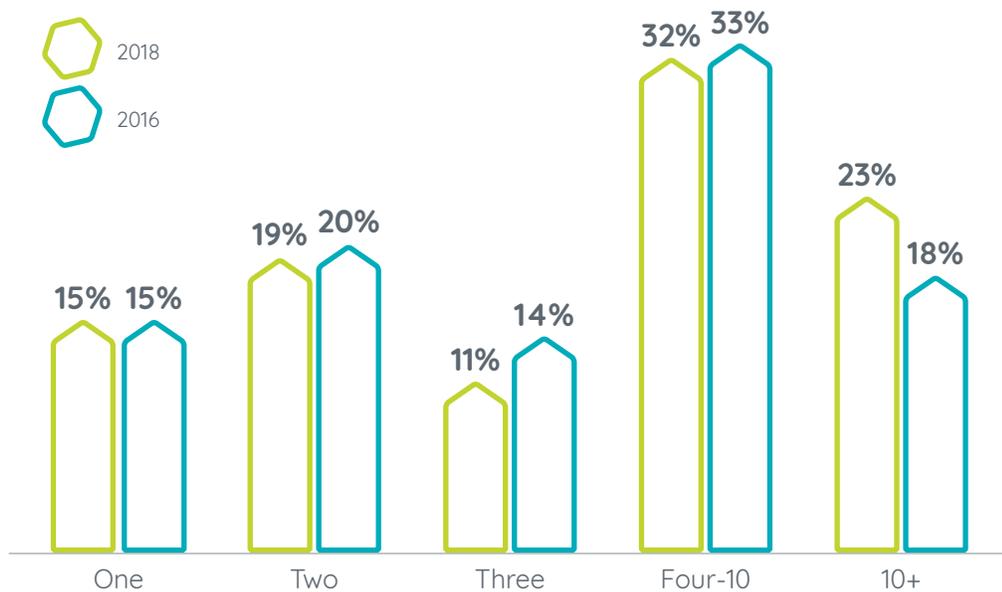


# Section 1: Donor Giving Behavior



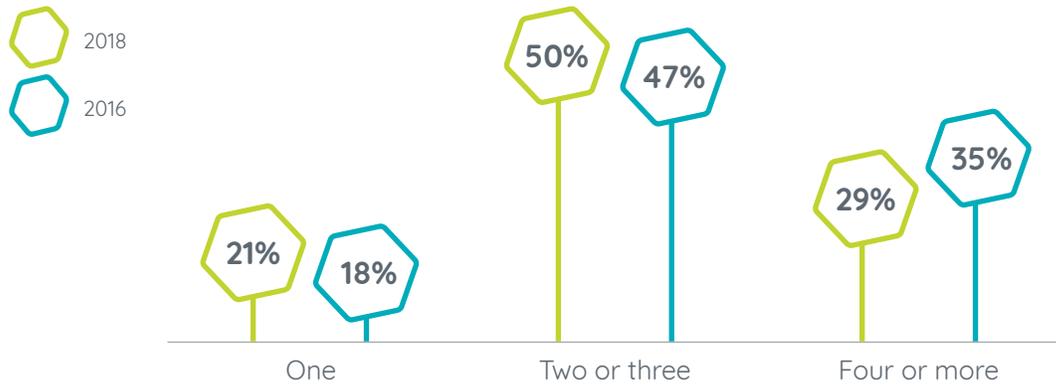
There are a growing number of ways in which donors can give to their favorite cause, making it more effortless for donors to contribute.

We continue to see the majority of donors giving more than four times annually to their favorite organization (Figure 1), with most donors spreading their contributions to multiple organizations (Figure 2). Both figures compare findings with the [2016 Donor Loyalty Study](#), where the same benchmarking questions were asked of survey respondents.



**Figure 1:** Thinking of the nonprofit organization or cause you donated to the most, how many times have you donated to that organization?

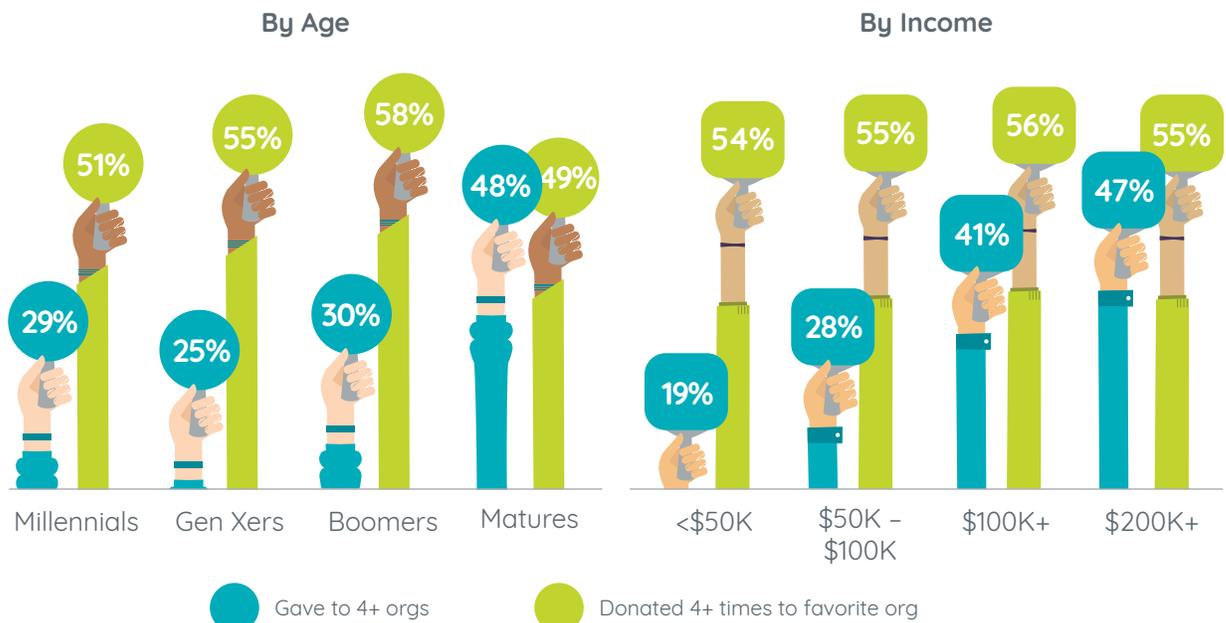




**Figure 2:** Approximately how many nonprofit organizations and charitable causes have you made a financial contribution to in the past 12 months? (Excluding place of worship, a school or alma mater.)

Donors representing the Matures generation are most likely to support at least four organizations, but are least likely to donate four or more times to their favorite organization (**Figure 3**). We see consistent levels of loyalty among the generations, with the largest percentage of Boomer donors (58 percent) donating to their favorite organization more than four times annually.

While income drives the number of organizations supported, it does not play a role in predicting donor loyalty.



**Figure 3:** Generational and income breakdowns of Figure 1 and Figure 2.



## How Donors Give

Donors are slightly more likely to give higher donations when sending in a donation than attending an event (Figure 4). However, it is important to note that events play a key role in donor loyalty and increasing a donor's likelihood to continue financially supporting an organization (we'll dig deeper into this in a later section). Millennial donors are most likely to contribute more when sending in a donation, while there's little difference in contribution amounts for Mature donors (Figure 5).



Figure 4: In what scenario are you likely to donate a higher dollar amount?

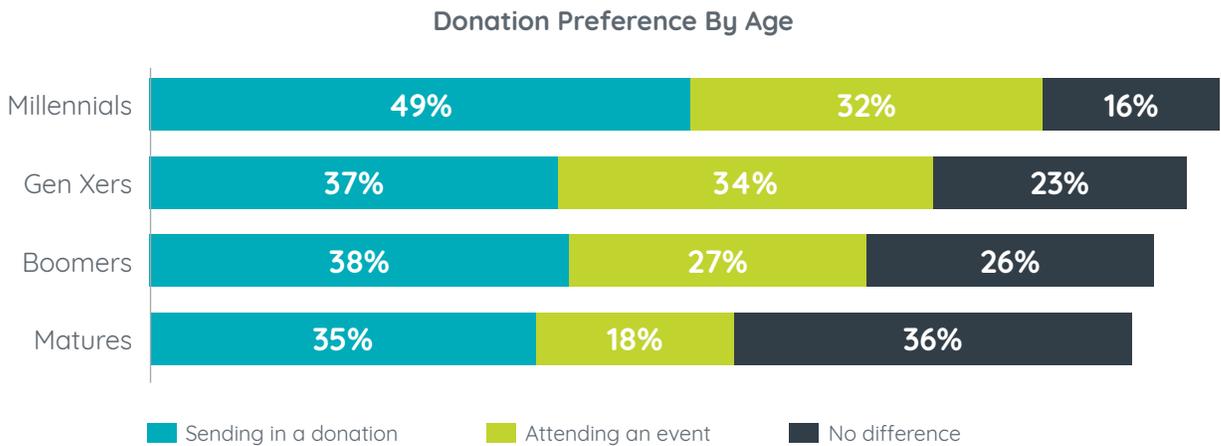
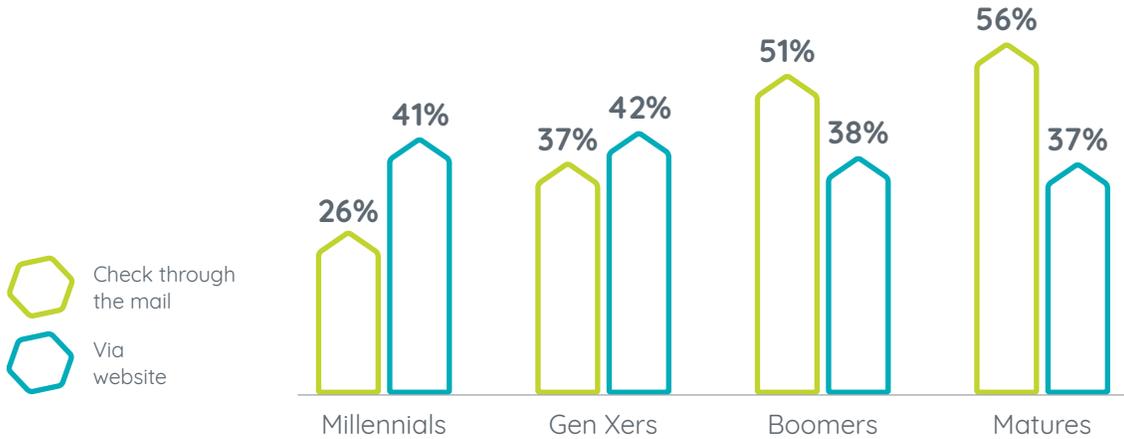


Figure 5: In what scenario are you likely to donate a higher dollar amount?



**Figure 6** shows how survey respondents sent in donations over the past 12 months. Donors are just as likely to donate online as they are to send a check in the mail. We see consistent online donation behavior across generations, but older donors are far more likely to also donate through a check in the mail. The top scenario for a donor to send a check in the mail is to memorialize someone, while donors were more likely to donate online when making a political statement. **Figure 7** highlights the top scenarios for each of these donation channels.



**Figure 6:** Which of the following ways have you been involved with charitable organizations in the past 12 months? (Please select all that apply.)



**Figure 7:** How did you make these donations over the past 12 months? (Select any that apply.)

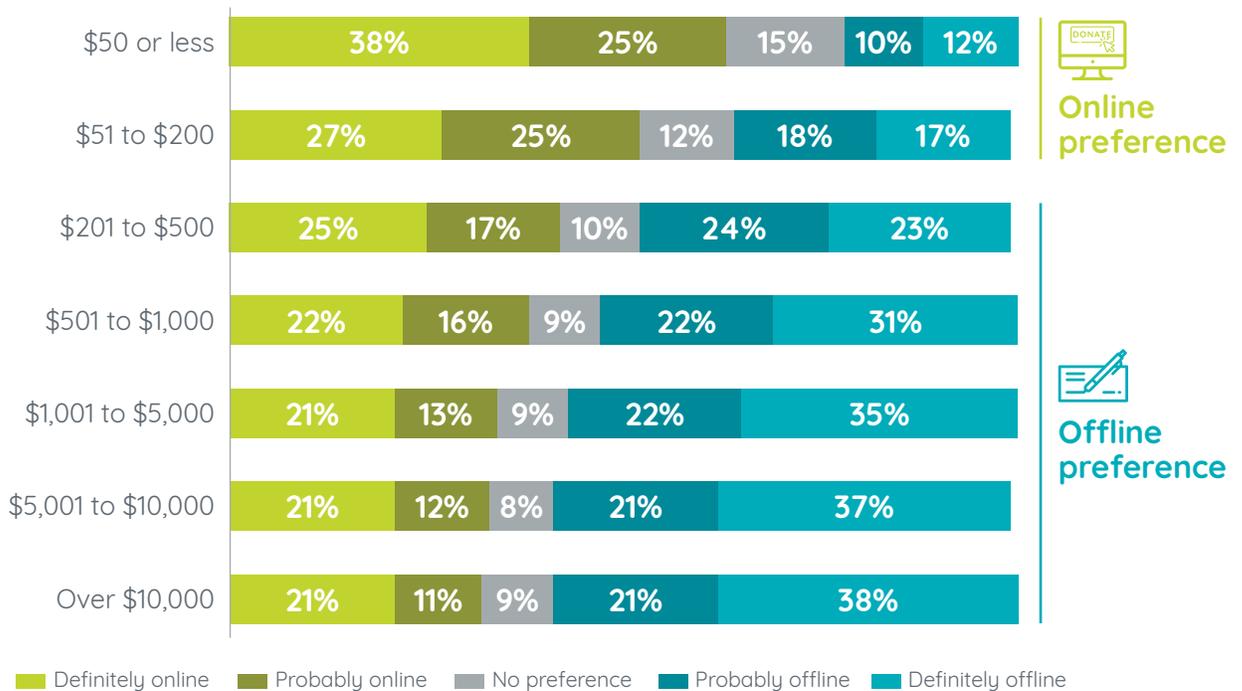


# Section 2: Donating Online and Offline



There is a tipping point for donors when it comes to preference for online versus offline giving.

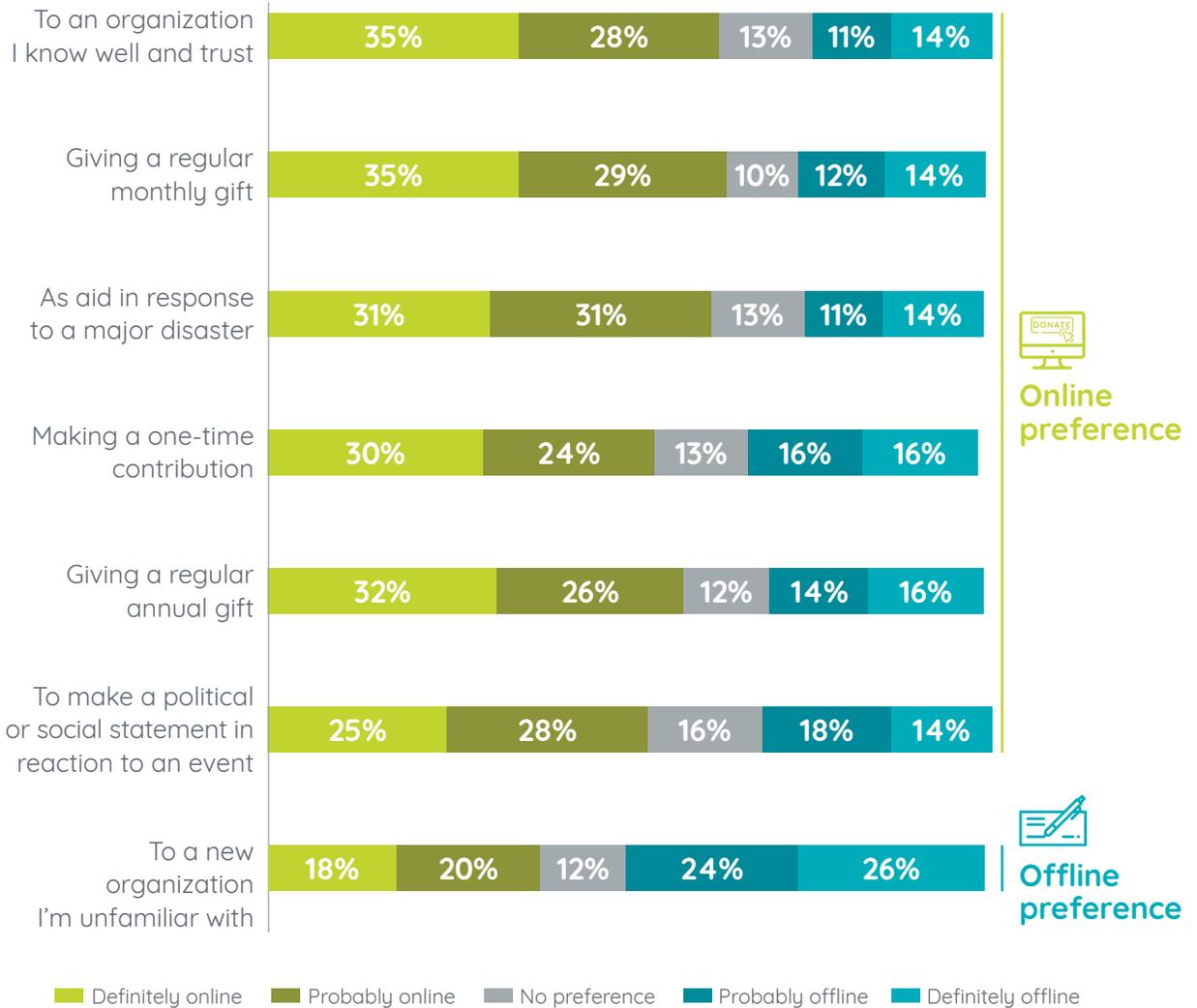
Higher donation amounts are preferred to be made offline (for example, in person or via check in the mail), with that preference increasing along with the donation amount (Figure 8). We start to see overall donor preference shift to offline giving at the \$300 amount, but there is still a sizeable percentage of donors who will give large donations online.



**Figure 8:** For the following dollar amounts of giving, would you rather donate online or offline (for example, in person or by sending a check through the mail)?



When it comes to different giving scenarios, the only preference for offline donations is when donors are giving to a new organization with which they're unfamiliar (**Figure 9**). Donors prefer to give online for their regular annual gift, monthly giving and one-time contributions.

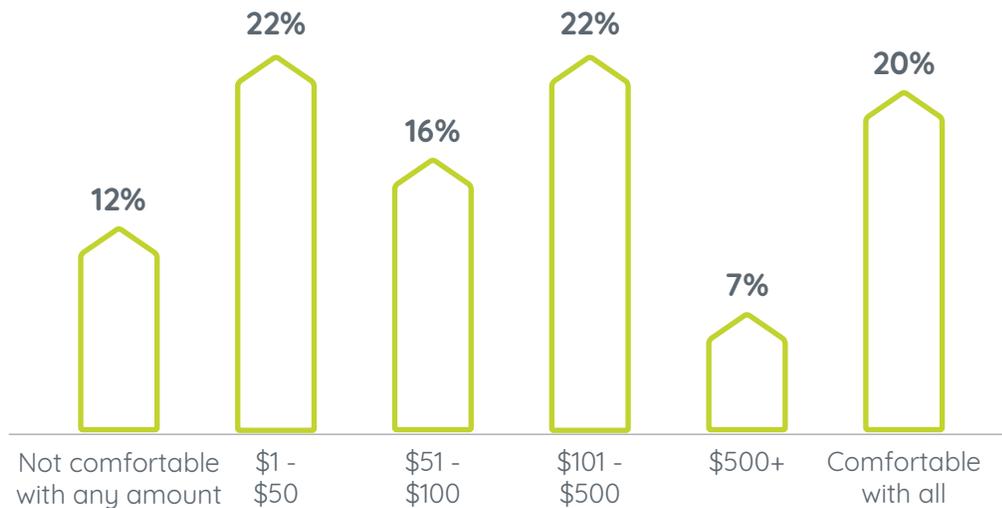


**Figure 9:** For the following giving scenarios, would you rather donate online or offline (for example, in person or by sending a check through the mail)?

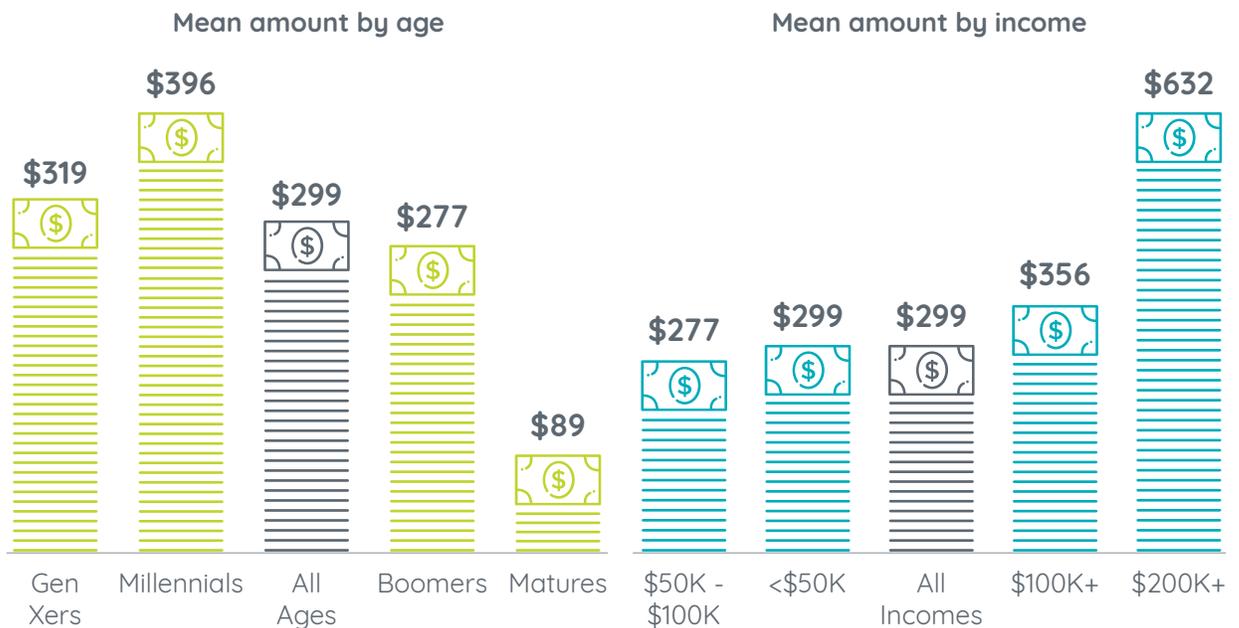


## Online Giving

Seventy-one percent of surveyed donors have made an online donation to a nonprofit. On average, about \$300 is the highest donation amount respondents would be comfortable giving online (**Figure 10**); however, 27 percent of donors would be comfortable donating more than \$500 online. Millennials and high-wealth donors are most likely to be comfortable donating higher amounts online (**Figure 11**). Donors from the Matures generation feel the least comfortable giving higher level donations online.



**Figure 10:** What is the highest dollar amount you would be comfortable giving online?



**Figure 11:** What is the highest dollar amount you would be comfortable giving online? (By age and income.)



The majority of surveyed donors agree that donating online is easy and they understand how to do it (Figure 12). Donors also agree that positive online experiences make them more likely to donate. While 74 percent of surveyed donors at least somewhat agree that online donations are secure, only one in three feels this way strongly. This could potentially explain the reluctance for donating higher amounts online, because those who only somewhat believe their donations are secure are not going to tolerate any risk with larger donations.

The only area where surveyed donors were split was around preference for mobile donations. It's not surprising that younger donors are far more likely to have a strong preference for doing all online donations through a mobile device, while older generations (especially Matures) strongly disagree.

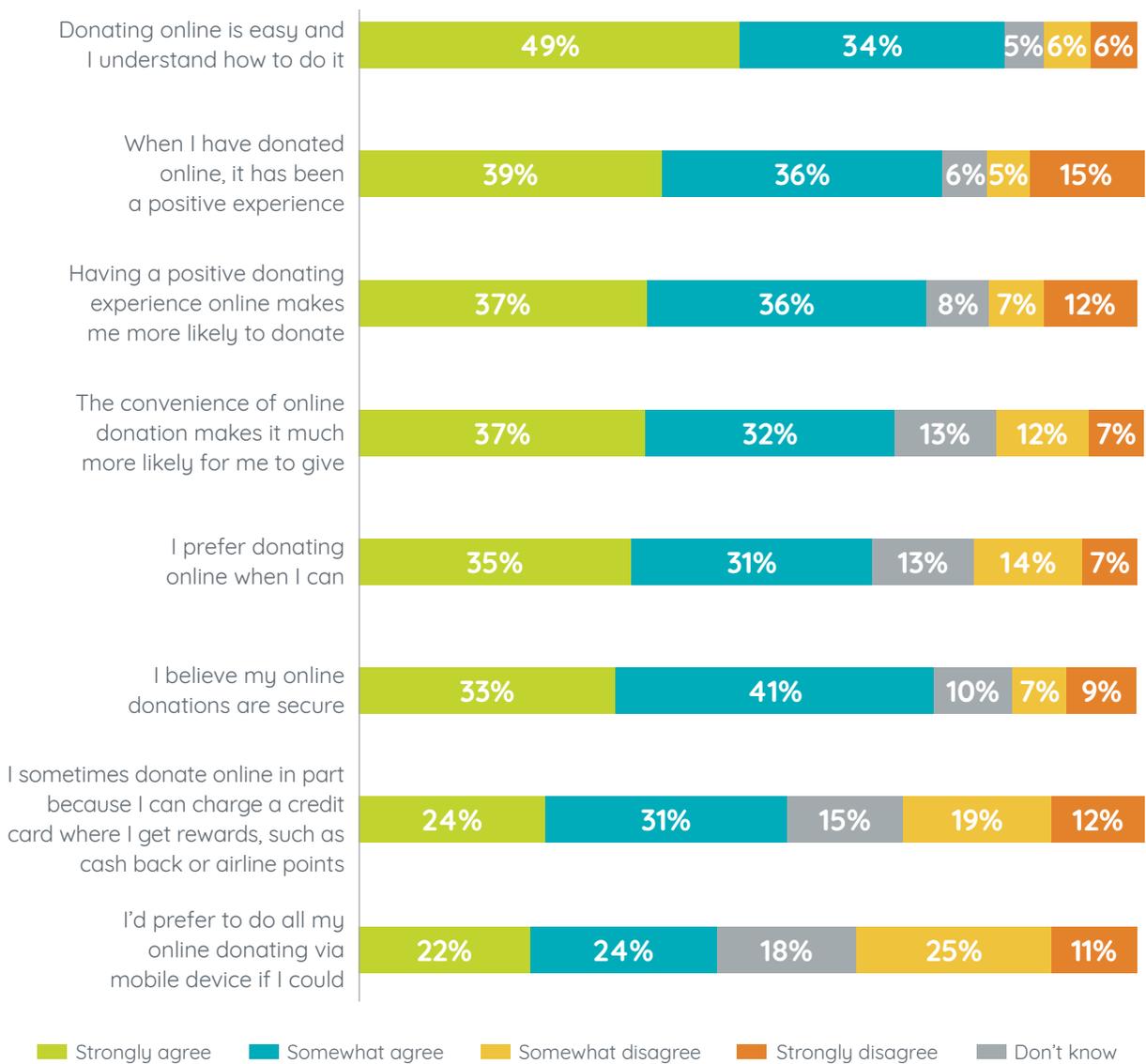
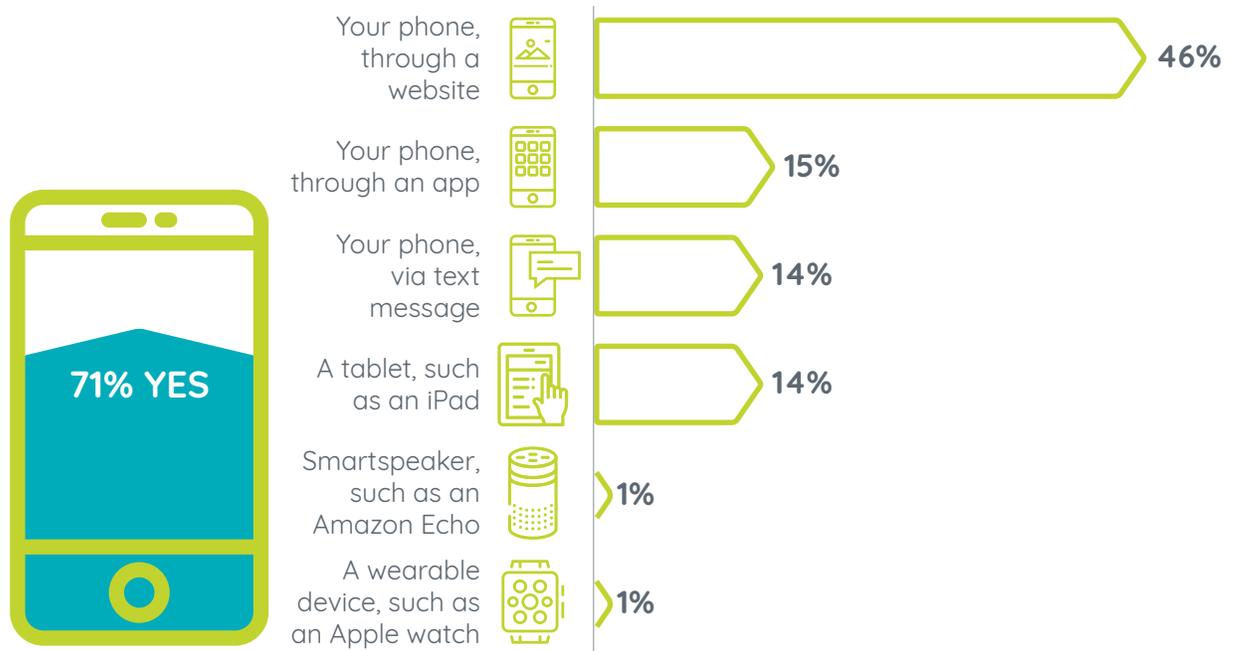


Figure 12: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



## Mobile Giving

Seventy-one percent of surveyed donors have made a donation on a mobile device. **Figure 13** shows the breakdown of mobile platforms used by donors. Donors are most likely to have visited an organization’s website via their mobile device when donating. Top scenarios for mobile giving include donating after seeing a social media post, to make a political statement and in response to a news event (**Figure 14**).



**Figure 13:** Have you ever made a donation using the following mobile platforms? (Select all that apply.)

### Top Scenarios for Online via Mobile/Text



Saw social media post



Political statement



In response to news event



In response to a natural disaster



Someone I know asked me

**Figure 14:** For the following giving scenarios, would you rather donate online or offline (for example, in person or by sending a check through the mail)? (Online via mobile/text responses.)



For every aspect of mobile giving (for example, website, app, text, etc.) younger donors are more likely to have used that method (Figure 15). They are also most interested in leveraging mobile giving, even if they haven't had the opportunity yet (Figure 16). Donors are most interested in donating through their phone – via an organization's website, mobile app and text. Few are interested, at this point, in donating through a wearable device or a smartspeaker, with Millennials most interested in leveraging these emerging technologies.

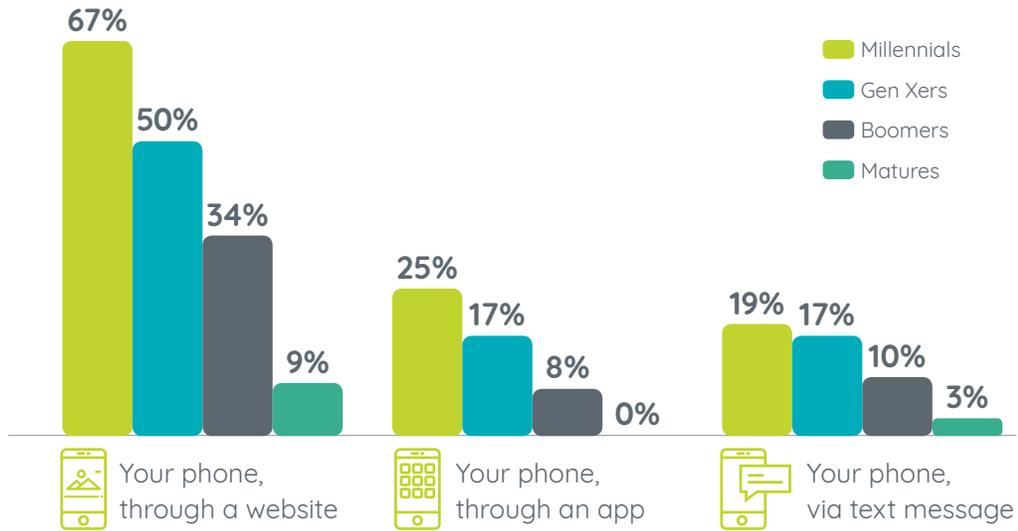


Figure 15: Have you ever made a donation using the following mobile platforms? (Mobile usage by age.)

	Millennials	Gen Xers	Boomers	Matures
Your phone, through a website	64%	58%	33%	10%
Your phone, through an app	47%	42%	21%	4%
Your phone, via text message	32%	28%	18%	6%
A tablet, such as an iPad	24%	25%	23%	10%
Smartspeaker, such as an Amazon Echo	10%	6%	3%	0%
A wearable device, such as an Apple watch	10%	4%	2%	0%

Figure 16: Regardless of whether or not you have ever made a donation using these platforms, through which of the following would you be interested in making a donation? (Select all that apply.)



# Section 3: Event Fundraising



The top reason donors attend events is to make a difference with the cause they support.

Figure 17 shows the most important aspects of events for donors. Events are likely to make donors – especially younger ones – feel more engaged with their organization (Figure 18), and donors report that a positive experience makes them more likely to donate (Figure 19). This is especially true for younger donors, with three-quarters of Millennials and two-thirds of Gen Xers saying they’re more likely to donate when they have had a positive fundraising event experience.

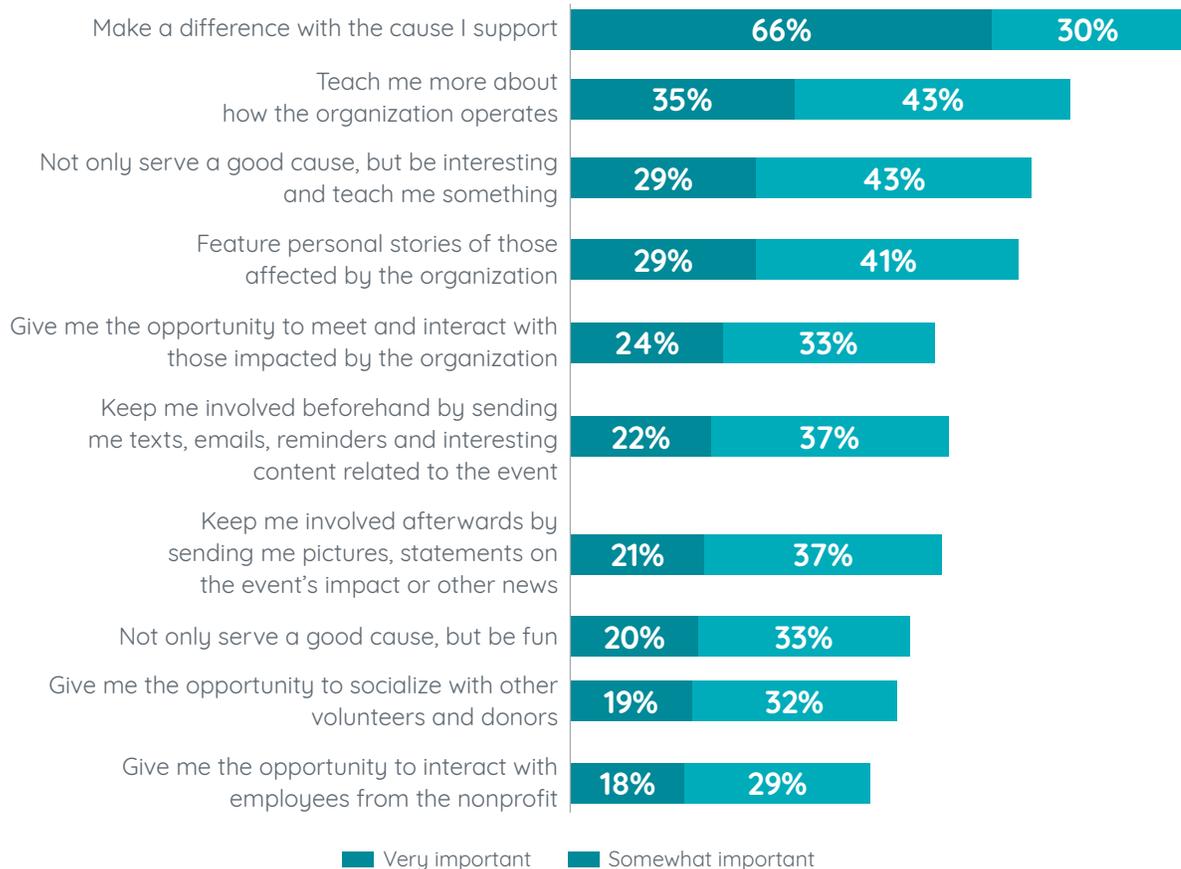
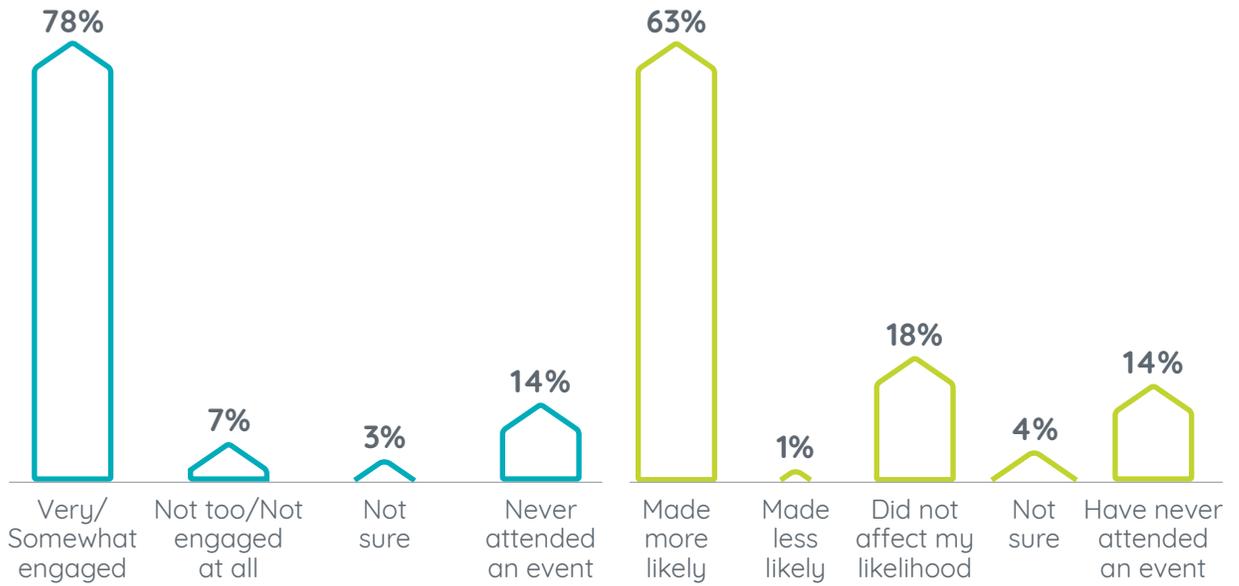


Figure 17: Thinking about events a nonprofit might hold, how important are each of the following when it comes to feeling engaged with that organization? (Percent very important/somewhat important.)





**Figure 18:** When you attend a fundraising event, how engaged with that organization does attending make you feel?

**Figure 19:** What effect does attending a fundraising event where you had a positive experience have on your decision on whether to financially support the nonprofit?

When it comes to rating experiences at fundraising events, the majority of survey respondents find registering and donating to be at least somewhat easy, while there is room for improvement when it comes to communicating about impact, post event (Figure 20). Overall, organizations that leverage technology to help run their fundraising events see a positive impact on donor experiences (Figure 21).

	Very easy	Somewhat easy	Somewhat difficult	Very difficult
Donating during the event	49%	26%	4%	1%
Registering for the event	44%	30%	4%	0%
Donating before the event	41%	31%	7%	1%
Learning about the impact of the event afterwards	30%	37%	11%	2%

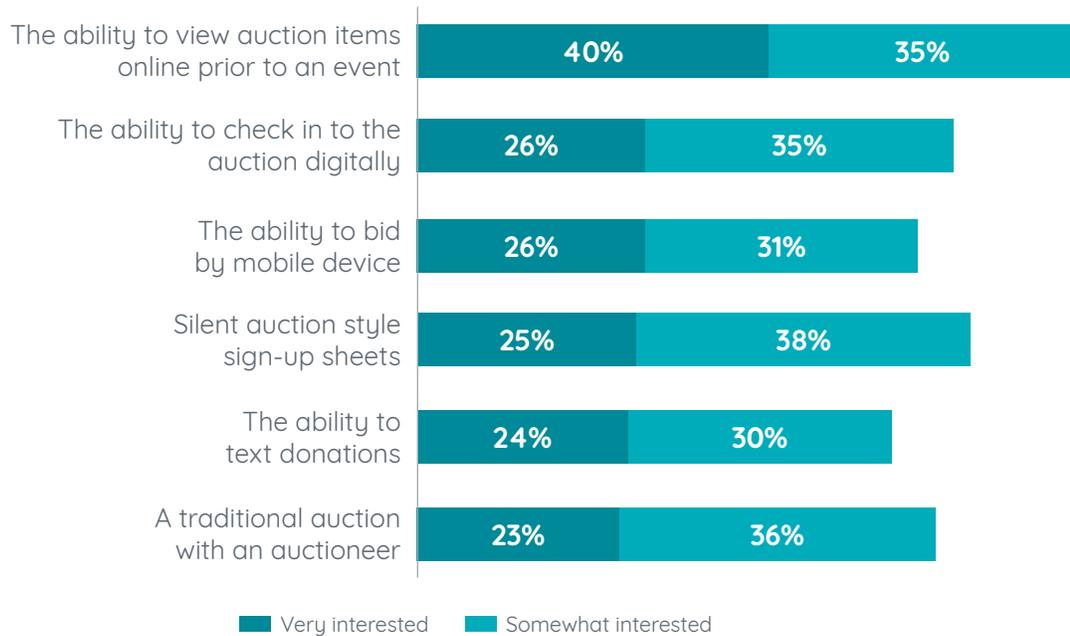
**Figure 20:** Thinking about the last nonprofit fundraising event you attended, please rate how easy or difficult your experience was on the following.





**Figure 21:** Some organizations use technology to enhance the experience at a fundraising event or auction. How would you rate your experiences with the following uses of technology?

While the majority of donors would be interested in using mobile technology during a fundraising auction (Figure 22), only 28 percent of donors say they’ve had an excellent experience with mobile bidding (Figure 21). Millennial donors are the most interested in leveraging technology to enhance fundraising auctions (Figure 23).



**Figure 22:** Thinking about a fundraising event that raises money by auctioning off donated items, how interested would you be in the following?



% Very interested in	Interest by Age			
	Millennials	Gen Xers	Boomers	Matures
The ability to view auction items online prior to an event	50%	45%	34%	25%
The ability to check in to the auction digitally	41%	31%	16%	7%
The ability to bid by mobile device	43%	32%	17%	5%
Silent auction style sign-up sheets	33%	27%	22%	7%
The ability to text donations	40%	26%	16%	4%
A traditional auction with an auctioneer	44%	23%	16%	13%

**Figure 23:** Thinking about a fundraising event that raises money by auctioning off donated items, how interested would you be in the following?



# Section 4: Donor Follow-Ups and Personalization



In the previous section, we highlighted that the lowest-rated fundraising event experience was the post event follow-up on impact. Event follow-ups play an important role in donor loyalty and satisfaction.

Figure 24 shows donor reactions after receiving different types of event follow-ups. More than three-quarters of surveyed donors say they would have a positive or neutral reaction to each potential follow-up. Impact reports on how the donation is being used are especially well received by all generations of donors (Figure 25). It's also important to note that donors are more interested in receiving personalized content, including recommendations for further engagement, than generic thank you emails.

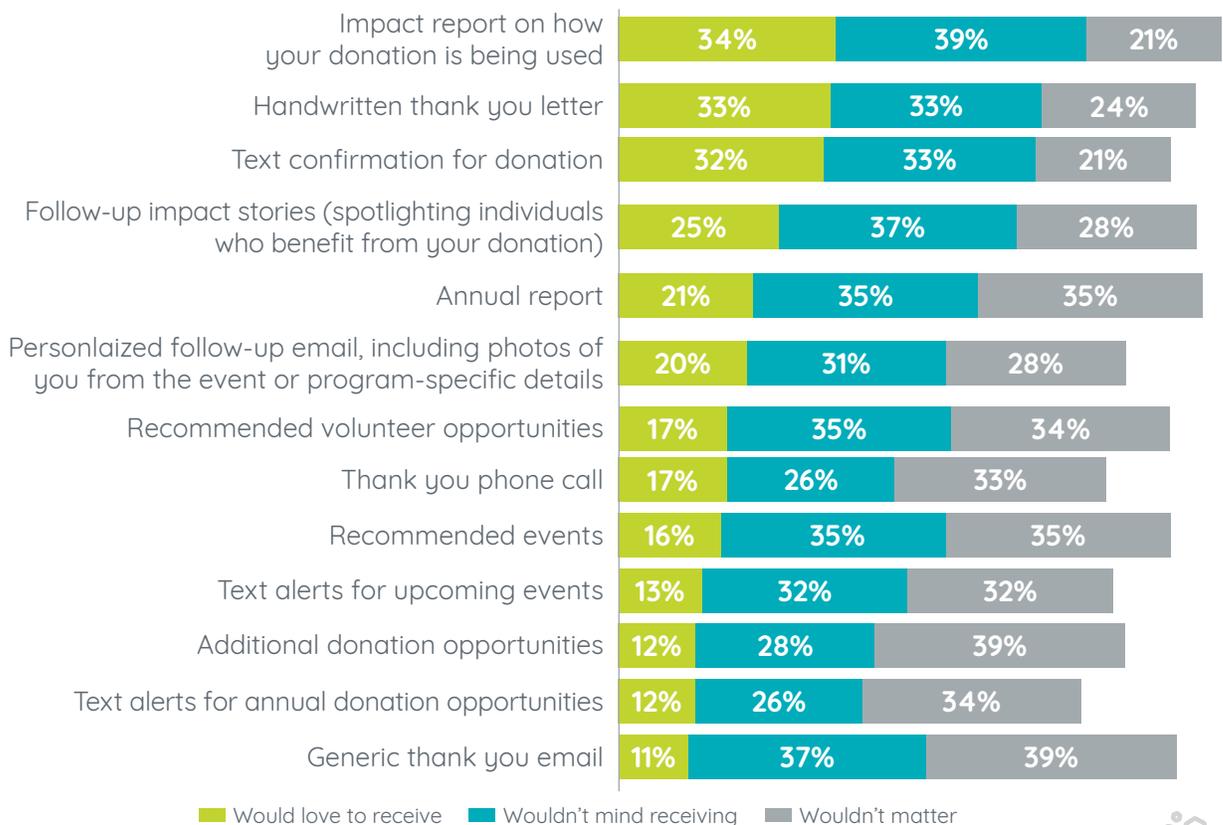


Figure 24: Which of the following best describes your feelings about each of these events or donation follow-ups you may receive from an organization?

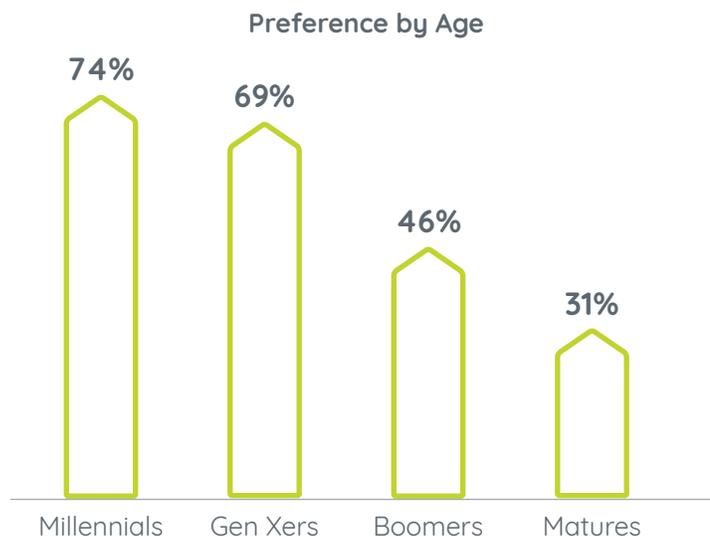


### Top 5 Follow-Up Preferences (By Age)



**Figure 25:** Which of the following best describes your feelings about each of these events or donation follow-ups you may receive from an organization?

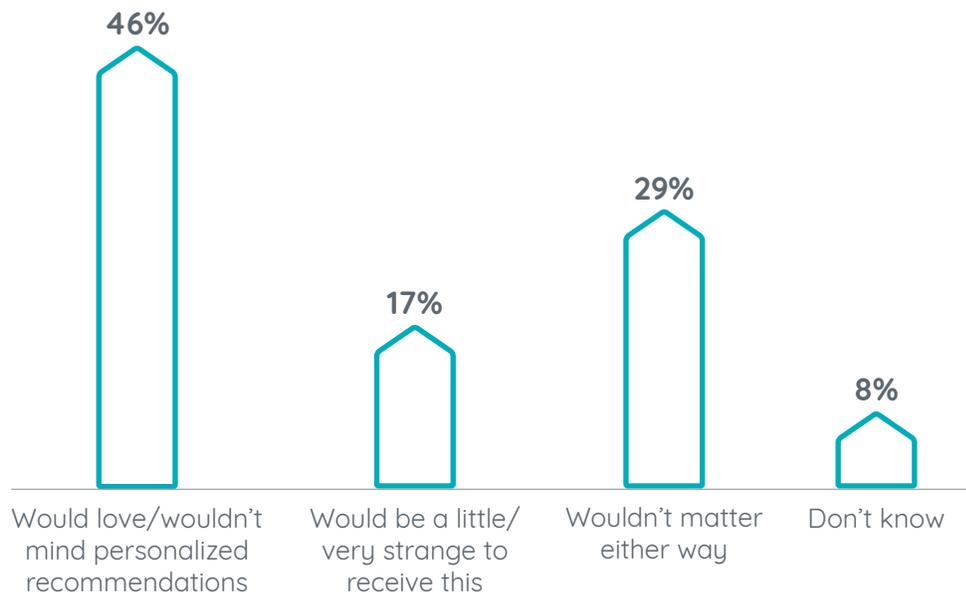
More than twice as many donors say they prefer personalized content (59 percent) than say they prefer generic content (26 percent). Preference for personalization decreases sharply with age (Figure 26). Seventy-four percent of Millennial donors prefer receiving personalized content, while only 31 percent of donors in the Matures generation feel the same way.



**Figure 26:** Thinking about content, such as emails, you may receive from nonprofits you support, which do you prefer?



When speaking more specifically about personalized recommendations for other events or engagement opportunities, nearly half say they would love or would not mind receiving these types of recommendations (Figure 27). Just one in six says it would be strange or creepy.



**Figure 27:** Which of the following best describes your feelings if a nonprofit sent you recommendations for the next event to attend or cause to advocate for, based on your previous donation history and online interactions?



# Recommendations



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Based on donor responses to our survey, there are a number of actions nonprofits can take to improve donor experiences and exceed their expectations. Here are our recommendations.

---

## 1 Map out current donor experiences (and identify areas for improvement).

Pay special attention to your online giving experience. Keep in mind the other great online experiences your donors have grown accustomed to, such as with Amazon and Netflix. How does your online donor journey stack up? This is especially important for younger generations of donors. We all SAY we want to better engage Millennials and younger donors, but what are we DOING to make that happen?!

## 2 Invest resources in mobile-first experiences.

Your website and donation forms MUST be mobile friendly. It's no longer an option or a nice-to-have. You need to invest in improving mobile giving experiences or risk losing potential donations. It's not just for younger donors either; 71 percent of donors have already given via a mobile device. If your current donation process is not mobile optimized and is too difficult, donors will simply go donate elsewhere. Simple, frictionless experiences will lead to repeat donors.

## 3 Evaluate your online donation forms.

The study gives good insight into how comfortable donors are with giving online. Use this information as a starting point to identify your suggested donation amounts. Try testing out monthly giving programs at or below the \$300 donation average. There's also still a big opportunity for large donations online, with 32 percent of donors saying they would give a \$10,000 donation online, so don't be afraid to ask for those or encourage them with your online forms. You can also use Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP) on your donation pages, incorporate security/trust seals, or list contact information to help build trust and confidence in the security of an online donation to your organization.



4

**Identify opportunities to amplify your fundraising event strategy.**

Events play a critical role in donor engagement and loyalty, especially for Millennials. Are your current fundraising events targeting younger donors? Take a step back and evaluate your current fundraising event strategy. Do you need to rethink ticket pricing or onsite content? What else can you do to get them to attend an event? Incorporating technology into your fundraising event, such as mobile bidding, or digital ticketing and check in, can have a positive impact on your event experiences. It's also important to identify opportunities to improve the connection between offline and online experiences.

5

**Incorporate impact reports into your post-event communication.**

The key to turning event attendees into loyal donors is the event follow-up experience. Don't just send one thank you communication, create a whole post-event series with impact reports and stories, as well as recommended events and donation opportunities. You can leverage marketing automation to incorporate personalized touches. More than twice as many donors say they prefer personalized (versus generic) content.

6

**Segment your donor appeals and communications, based on age and income.**

It's apparently clear that age and income impact how donors like to give. Think through and plan your appeals – what are you asking for, what type of gift are you hoping for and who are you asking? However, you won't be able to segment based on age group and income if you're not tracking that data. It's crucial to ask key questions of your donors and maintain that demographic information to make this kind of segmentation possible. All the data in this report will help you segment and make the right ask, to the right people, in the right way.



## Survey Methodology

This survey was conducted online by Finn Partners, reaching N=1,000 nonprofit donors. Nonprofit donors are defined as those who have donated any amount of money to at least one nonprofit organization in the past 12 months. (Those who only donated to an alma mater, school or place of worship, and those who didn't donate to a nonprofit at all, were excluded.) The surveys were conducted between January 31 and February 5, 2018. The data were weighted slightly by region, gender, race, age, income and education. A random sample of N=1,000 respondents has a margin of error of about +/- 3.1 percent for the full sample. The margin of error is higher for subgroups within each sample.

## About Community Brands

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