



## AFP Information Exchange

### What Women Want: Understanding the Needs and Objectives of Women's Philanthropic Giving

*Written by:*

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# What Women Want

## Understanding the Needs and Objectives of Women's Philanthropic Giving

Katherine Swank, J.D., Consultant, Target Analytics, a Blackbaud Company

### Executive Summary

Women, as a group, are increasingly impacting fundraising efforts in the U.S.; however, their philanthropic objectives can differ significantly from men's. Women tend to focus on specific sectors and want greater accountability for their gifts. On the whole, women want to create new solutions, seek more contact and control, and want to be kept informed of the results from their giving. Many also seek social networks within the organizations that interest them. If women are among your majority donors, you may need to change the way you speak with them and start listening for their direction.

### Women!

Only a decade ago, non-profit organizations were focused on finding the "millionaire next door." At that time, he was a 50-something-year old married man who owned his own business and drove a Ford Explorer.<sup>1</sup> But things have changed in just the past ten years. Today's affluent philanthropist is just as likely to be a woman as a man and she wants something different from her philanthropic giving.

Nearly half of the top wealth-holders in the United States are women, including the more than 3 million Americans with annual incomes of more than \$550,000. In less than a decade, they have increased their combined wealth by more than fifty percent and now have a net worth of over \$6 trillion. Two of every five businesses in this country – over ten million enterprises – are women-owned.

Demographically, affluent women can be identified by several common characteristics. The "average" affluent woman is around 49-years old. She may have started her own business when she was forced to overcome a family or work obstacle, and frequently identifies her business affiliation as "self-employed". She is most often a homeowner and, if married, she might easily earn as much as seventy percent of the household income. Marital status is less a factor in defining the affluent women, because many are divorced or have never married.<sup>2</sup> However, marital status plays a significant role in philanthropic giving. According to the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University, single women are significantly more likely than single men to make charitable gifts and married couples give more than single men.

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Affluent women may also be identified by their willingness to both donate and volunteer at higher levels than their male counterparts. Women, on average, donate twice as much to charity and make three times the number of donations as men. <sup>3</sup>

If you can easily identify affluent women among your constituents you are already well on your way to reaping the benefits they may want to provide you. If you cannot, you may want to consider gathering or purchasing demographic data such as age, household income and marital status. Traditional prospect research screening services that identify business affiliations, nonprofit board involvement and gifts to other organizations will also assist in identifying key women philanthropists.

## What women want

While I can't claim to know what all women want in every situation, over twenty-five years in philanthropy has taught me that what women want is simple: to be asked their opinion and for their answers to be listened to and acted upon. They seek equality in the workplace, an ever-equal sharing of the 'load' from their male partners and counterparts, and to make the world a better place, both close to home and half-way around the world. Elementally, women want their lives to make a difference in the lives of others. To accomplish this through philanthropy makes women feel empowered.

The topic of women in philanthropy is finally gaining its due study. Several books and a growing number of philanthropic institutes have helped us to see a clearer picture. One resource focuses on the "Six C's" of women's motivation for giving.<sup>4</sup> Which are:

1. To create new solutions to old problems.
2. To use their financial power to effect change rather than to preserve the status quo.
3. To make a commitment (or commit) to the organization's vision.
4. To enjoy a personal connection with the institution or organization.
5. To collaborate and work with others as part of a larger effort.
6. To celebrate!

In concert with these motivations, women are seeking greater control of the resources they have produced and therefore expect greater accountability from the nonprofit organizations that they support. Be transparent in your communications. Report your results proudly and frequently. Personalize your communications so that your donors get a greater understanding of the impact of their individual gift.

## What women support

Three out of every four people living in poverty in the U.S. have been identified as women and children. This statistic has not been lost on benevolent women. Women make charitable gifts to a variety of

## What Women Want



### About the Author

Katherine Swank, J.D.

With more than 20 years of legal and nonprofit management experience, Katherine Swank has raised approximately \$215 million for national healthcare and public broadcasting organizations, as well as an independent law school. Prior to joining Blackbaud in May 2007, Ms. Swank was the national director of gift planning at the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, where she provided fundraising consulting services to the Society's chapter leadership and development staff for six years. She is an affiliate faculty member of Regis University's master of nonprofit management degree program in Denver, teaching classroom and online courses on wealth and philanthropy. She holds an independent studies degree from the University of Northern Colorado and a law degree from the Drake University School of Law in Des Moines, Iowa.

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causes, but research shows the majority is designated for the needs of children, opportunities for women, education and health issues. They also support causes that provide, economic opportunities for all, promote diversity, and support the arts and the environment. These gifts mostly go to support grassroots nonprofits or are restricted to grassroots programs if the gift is given to a larger or national-level organization. It's not just affluent women who make gifts, however. Women with annual incomes of less than \$10,000, who are often homemakers with children at home, gave 5.4 percent of their adjusted gross income to charity – the largest income-to-gift percentage of which I am aware!

Challenge grants and matching gifts are embraced by female donors. They see it as a way to leverage their own donations and insure that their interests, as well as their financial resources, are matched by others. When it comes to increasing gift size and promoting unrestricted giving, consider starting donor education programs. Studies show that women who participate in these programs and learn about the charity's goals, objectives, programmatic offerings and future plans are more likely to give larger gifts, unrestricted gifts, develop long-term gift planning and hold leadership roles within the organization.

"Giving circles" or collective giving is emerging as a new force in philanthropy. Because they are a flexible form of philanthropy, giving circles take a variety of structures and sizes, ranging from informal potluck dinners to highly organized circles requiring minimum contributions to pooled resources of thousands of dollars and multi-year commitments. New Ventures in Philanthropy took a recent 'scan' of 61 giving circles. These groups represent more than 5,300 donors who have raised and made grants of more than \$23 million.<sup>5</sup> Apart from their structure they are a high-engagement form of philanthropy that seems to have a special appeal to women. Members take part in collective decision-making and educational activities and the circle's grant-making functions may include formal Request for Proposals, proposal reviews, and site visits. For some, this social activity seems to offer a more enriching and rewarding philanthropic experience than more passive "checkbook" forms of philanthropy.

Regardless of the charitable sector under which your organization falls, you probably have programmatic interests that are of interest to women. Find out what those are and provide information on them in a manner that motivates these donors: Allow them the opportunity to **create** new solutions and use their financial power to effect **change**. Ask for their **commitment** and provide a personal **connection** with your organization. Show them how you are **collaborating** with other nonprofit partners and **celebrate** their gifts and the impact they have.

## How to talk to women

If you want to know how to talk to women, there is one sure-fire way to find out: Ask them! Women often like to communicate in a round-robin, give-and-take fashion. Interactive events such as women's dinner clubs, investments groups and giving circles facilitate the socialization women seek with each other.

Larry Stelter, president and CEO of The Stelter Company, a national planned giving communications firm and a long-time friend and planned giving colleague of mine, has convinced me that gender-slanted

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publications sent to women-only lists are more effective for this group than gender-neutral ones. His company has conducted focus groups that have concluded both donors and potential donors respond to publications and donor-examples that most closely mirror how these individuals view themselves: in age, in physical appearance, financial status, interests and values. <sup>6</sup>

He points out that single women likely make up a growing portion of the 65-and-older audience. Three out of every four women ages 85 or older is widowed. Couple this fact with two more: women tend to marry men a few years older than themselves and they enjoy a longer life expectancy, and it is clear that major gifts made in later life years and final legacy gifts will largely be made by women. When it comes to giving it away and passing it along women are the more generous gender: nearly half of all women who have estates worth \$5 million or more leave a charitable bequest, while only one-third of wealthy men do.<sup>7</sup> Communications and marketing pieces should reflect an understanding that the final decision-maker is more often female.

Choose donor testimonials and pictorial representations accordingly.

Reflect on Larry's well-informed advice in this area and seek to identify with your female donor base. Consider using informal or formal focus groups of the women who represent the audience you are trying to reach. Ask them:

- What interests them in your organization?
- What do they think your most important programs are?
- What would they most like to see their gifts support?
- What do they think you could be doing better?
- What kinds of information and communications would they like to receive from you?
- How often would they like to receive those communications?
- What other ways would they like to be involved in the organization?

According to a study by Partners in Philanthropic Planning,<sup>8</sup> a majority of charitable bequests and charitable gift annuity donors are women and slightly less than half of all charitable trust donors are women. With the average planned gift ranging somewhere between \$30,000 and \$80,000 in the U.S., you can't afford to overlook the power of legacy giving. If you have gathered a group of representative constituents as previously suggested, this is an excellent opportunity to also assess their willingness to consider making a planned gift to the organization. If their response is positive also find out what planning vehicle they would use. Ask them if they would consider making a bequest or trust gift? Describe charitable gift annuities and other life income gifts to see if these methods appeal to them. Inquire about gifts of stock and real estate, gifts from a retirement account or life insurance policy. Evidence of fiscal conservatism or fiscal aggressiveness among your female donors may suggest certain gift solutions over others.

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Finally, find out from these women in what manner they would like to celebrate their own gifts and find out about the gifts of others. Women often seek to be less public about their donations than men and traditional donor stories, media announcements and public recognition are not always desired.

The answers to these questions will guide you in your communications, gift solicitations and recognition efforts with your women prospects.

## Summary

Many charitable organizations either have misperceptions about female donors or they have decided just to do things the way they always have – which many will admit is no longer working. Women increasingly choose charitable interests separate and distinct from their spouse or family and it would be wise to approach them, not as part of a couple or a unit, but as an individual donor. It's time to identify and understand your female constituency, to speak to them differently, to ask for their involvement both financial and with their time and to consider them as one of the most important components of your donor base.

*Later in this series of white papers on wealth and philanthropy in America we will explore the characteristics that further identify unique sub-groups of the affluent including, gay-lesbian-bisexual-transgendered philanthropists and emerging philanthropic groups including African-Americans, Asian-Americans and Hispanic Heritage-Americans. Additionally, we'll look at the specific communication methods and mission-messages that most appeal to these groups and make specific cultivation and solicitation suggestions.*

Previous papers in this series available in the Resources section at [www.blackbaud.com](http://www.blackbaud.com): *"Wealth and Philanthropy in America: Target Affluent Prospects to Sustain Your Annual and Major Gift Programs"*

- <sup>1</sup> Stanley, Thomas J. and William D. Danko, *The Millionaire Next Door*, Pocket Books, 1996.
- <sup>2</sup> Stanley, Thomas J., *Millionaire Women Next Door*, Andrew McMeel Publishing, 2004.
- <sup>3</sup> Nichols, Judith, Ph.D., CFRE, *Pinpointing Affluence in the 21st Century*, Bonus Books, Inc. 2001.
- <sup>4</sup> Shaw-Hardy, Sondra C. and Martha A. Taylor, *Reinventing Fundraising, Realizing the Potential of Women's Philanthropy*, Jossey Bass, 1995.
- <sup>5</sup> *New Ventures in Philanthropy, "Giving Together: A National Scan of Giving Circles and Shared Giving,"* 2005.
- <sup>6</sup> Stelter, Larry, *How to Raise Planned Gifts by Mail*, Emerson & Church, 2008.
- <sup>7</sup> Nichols.
- <sup>8</sup> Formerly the National Committee on Planned Giving, [www.pppnet.org](http://www.pppnet.org).

## About Blackbaud

Blackbaud is the leading global provider of software and services designed specifically for nonprofit organizations, enabling them to improve operational efficiency, build strong relationships, and raise more money to support their missions. Approximately 24,000 organizations — including The American Red Cross, Cancer Research UK, Earthjustice, International Fund for Animal Welfare, Lincoln Center, The Salvation Army, The Taft School, Tulsa Community Foundation, Ursinus College, the WGBH Educational Foundation, and Yale University — use one or more Blackbaud products and services for fundraising, constituent relationship management, financial management, website management, direct marketing, education administration, ticketing, business intelligence, prospect research, consulting, and analytics. Since 1981, Blackbaud's sole focus and expertise has been partnering with nonprofits and providing them the solutions they need to make a difference in their local communities and worldwide. Headquartered in the United States, Blackbaud also has operations in Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. For more information, visit [www.blackbaud.com](http://www.blackbaud.com).

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