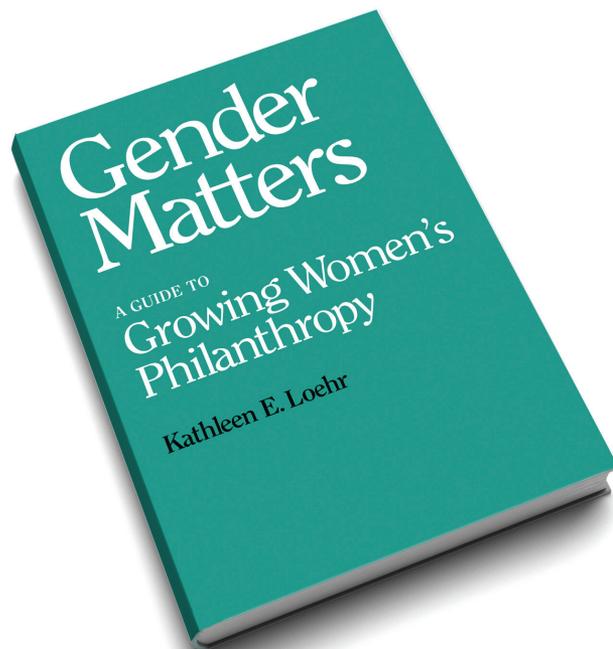


# How and Why You Should Grow Support From Women

Raise more money by embracing  
gendered differences in fundraising

BY KATHLEEN E. LOEHR



**W**omen are the fastest-growing philanthropic group, and they have wealth, influence, and a commitment to change. They are where the dollars and decision-making power are now and will be for some time. But as women's power and earnings grow, the philanthropic sector repeatedly fails to take full advantage of this new reality. The clear majority of nonprofits, schools, and universities still use fundraising practices that either turn off women or gain only minimal support from them. So much more is possible.

Women are driving change in business and the home. A few facts:

- Women earn more educational degrees and make up the majority of undergraduate students.
- Women hold 51 percent of managerial and professional jobs in the workplace.
- Women are 42 percent of the top wealth holders in the United States.
- Women are the fastest-growing segment of wealthy individuals; in the past decade, the number of women earning more than \$100,000 tripled.
- Women make the majority of consumer decisions in the home.

The two biggest indicators for philanthropy are education and earnings. By that measure, women now have the potential for increased and influential roles in philanthropic giving.

The Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy has existed in various forms for more than 25 years. WPI provides in-depth research on women's giving that shows that gender matters. Yet, despite documented differences in giving

trends between men and women, fundraisers often still apply the same approach to most donors, regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, or ethnicity.

WPI's research shows that when women are seen, valued, heard, and involved, they give more over a longer period of time and are more deeply involved. When they don't feel known and connected, they give small gifts out of obligation or to meet immediate needs.

In short, gender matters in philanthropy. Men and women have different motivations for giving and different patterns of giving. By not embracing the differences, we are looking for resources for our critical societal issues with one hand tied behind our backs. We unconsciously use outdated and biased approaches that may not appeal to half our population. By embracing gendered differences, we will engage more potential donors, generate more buzz for our missions, and raise more money.

It is time to put a spotlight on our current fundraising behaviors, discern their

effectiveness when applied to women, and consciously choose ways to adapt our approach as needed.

Changing behavior is hard. Creating new strategies is even harder, especially when our fundraising "best practices" are working so well, and we are rewarded for our successes today. But a four-part process—based on a well-researched, effective design model called "Appreciative Inquiry"—will lead to sustained change to grow your support from women.

### Discover

What do you know and what do you need to know? You cannot make successful choices if you remain unaware. First, focus on the facts about women's giving based on national research. Recognize that women do not behave the same way all the time, just as all men don't.

Second, explore your own data and hold interviews or do a survey with your women stakeholders. Listening deeply to their input is a key part of the discovery process. How do they feel about their relationship to your organization? How do they describe you? What do they care about? How can you gain more of their voice and input? What is working and what is missing? Learning to listen more openly brings deeper understanding as well as guideposts for what can be done differently.

Third, look at your current fundraising behaviors. What might be in your collective best practices that gets in the way of growing support from women? Where might you have blinders on? Humans prefer certainty and patterns. How does that impede change? You may unknowingly hold myths about how women give. Becoming curious about internal narratives will awaken your energy toward change, a crucial ingredient to committing to new actions.

### Dream

Review the discovery inputs, and create a practical vision for what you want to accomplish to grow women's influence and support for your mission. If discovery were enough, we'd all jump into effective action as soon as we learn new information. However, knowledge does not bring change; behaviors do. Sustained and effective behavior change after the first excitement of an idea comes from gathering deeper understanding, engaging more people with additional views, and clarifying what you will focus on.

Your practical vision will be unique to your organization and culture. What specific aspirations do you want to achieve? Changing behaviors and best practices will be awkward at best, and, some might say, daunting. Yet it is this very lack of adapted behaviors that has stalled the growth of women's philanthropy. Only with a clear and compelling vision of the desired outcomes can we cut through the natural human resistance that occurs. With your vision, you will know when to say "no" to some ideas and actions for the sake of a clear "yes" in alignment with your goals. With your vivid, imagined picture of what is possible, you will be more likely to design and achieve bold outcomes.

### Design

This is where implementation begins, contained within the practical vision you have chosen. You can't do everything all at once. In fact, often when you embark on change, you do better to begin with a few smaller steps to grow the new muscles of behavioral practice. If your focus is on growing the number of women in your prospect portfolios, how might adapting your research impact new ways of finding, connecting to, and soliciting women prospects? If you want to transform your communication, what language resonates? What are women looking for in your print and social media? How might you

**Inquiry from a position of curiosity and openness to absorb new information not only reveals the strengths of your organization, it also uncovers how your women stakeholders see you and how they see themselves connecting with your organization, now and in the future.**

communicate to inspire women? Other questions to consider: How can you share information about impact differently or involve women in meaningful ways that fit their busy lives? How do you design personal meetings? How and when do you ask for a gift and do it boldly? Is an ask always done individually, or might you include the family or network? What stewardship resonates? Finally, what are the unique metrics you want to track?

### Destiny

At this point in the journey, you have the sustaining power of a networked team committed to your vision—continually learning, sharing, creating, and collaborating. The focus on women is infused in all fundraising processes and practices and is updated whenever more is learned. Much more has occurred than the achievement of your original goal. You have created a new normal in your fundraising practices. You've also created a sustainable design

process that will welcome more diverse donors, beyond just women, to support your mission.

My goal is to help development leaders, fundraisers, and volunteers consciously create specific actions to maximize women's philanthropy. The word *consciously* is key. My aim is to make overt the hidden stories and current practices that unknowingly may not connect with women. With this awareness, you will be better able to make different choices about fundraising adaptations.

It is time to open the valve of women's support, power, and influence as well as their philanthropy. This approach is not just for mega-gifts—there are countless women across our communities who will give to you and have not been sought out or shown the value of your cause. You can use this model to adapt behaviors that will increase the number of women meaningfully engaged in your programs, grow supportive networks for your mission, or increase bold giving to your campaigns.

As seen by 19th- and 20th-century movements for causes such as abolition, temperance, and suffrage, women have always had an important, if not fully realized or appreciated, role to play in solving society's greatest problems. Today, as hundreds of thousands of women across the political spectrum participate in marches and activism, they are signaling a clear desire to contribute to the world. Let's not miss this moment. We have important challenges to solve in our society, and women are the missing ingredient to accelerate the changes we seek.

### Know Your Donors and Stakeholders

I can't emphasize enough how critical it is to get the actual perceptions of women donors and other stakeholders into your discovery process before you move forward into dream and design. Surveys, focus groups, and structured interviews can provide critical information about

women donors and stakeholders such as board members, leadership, and development staff.

However, when not done correctly, such explorations can lead to mistaken findings and bad decisions. When done well, you gain invaluable information, so it helps to work with someone who can design your psychometrics.

Asking questions of women can provide rich, qualitative information. And as you know, asking questions is a wonderful cultivation technique for donors and prospects. When we listen to others and open our own thinking, we end up testing our conscious or unconscious assumptions. Asking high-quality questions and really paying attention to the answers helps update beliefs. It also develops a shared understanding of differences that leads to better decisions. Inquiry from a position of curiosity and openness to absorb new information not only reveals the strengths of your organization; it also uncovers how your women stakeholders see you and how they see themselves connecting with your organization, now and in the future. Asking questions also builds relationships, enabling people to be understood as human beings rather than in their roles of leader, staff member, or donor. Building authentic relationships is at the core of our fundraising.

Bring the voice of your women stakeholders into your discovery. Asking a woman one-on-one about her experiences in philanthropy will provide you with rich, qualitative answers not gathered in larger groups or surveys. If you have limited time, pose the following questions to several of your donors:

- What has been your most exciting experience in giving? It does not need to be related to this organization.
- Tell me the story. What happened?
- What enabled this gift? What role did you play? What role did the organization play? What role did the staff person

## Women's Philanthropic Influence

With increased earnings and education, women have demonstrated a heightened focus on philanthropy. Women are giving more and influencing more philanthropy. Repeatedly, studies find that women have a greater inclination to give than men do:

- Single women are more likely than similarly situated single men to give to charity.
- Women give significantly more than similarly situated men at almost all income levels.
- Baby boomers and older women are more likely to give than their male counterparts at all giving levels.
- Women are more likely to give a higher amount to 10 out of 11 charitable subsectors, with the exception of the sports/recreation subsector.

play in relationship to this experience?

- What else made this experience possible?

You will learn her values, motivations, and preferences for relationships, information, and stewardship.

Women's philanthropic influence becomes all the more apparent when we understand household giving patterns. (This research is based on heterosexual couple giving patterns. Research on same-sex couple giving patterns is a field of study that needs more attention.) Research shows that:

- For every \$10,000 that the wife's income increases, total household giving increases by more than 5 percent. In comparison, for every \$10,000 the

husband's income increases, total household giving increases by 3 percent.

- WPI found that nearly three-quarters of general population households decide jointly on philanthropy and, in high-net-worth households, nearly half jointly decide. When only one spouse decides, the wife decides twice as often as the husband. This means that the women of the household are almost always involved in family giving decisions.
- Women's influence in giving decisions transcends generations. One WPI study examined whether generational shifts in charitable giving intersect with women's changing decision-making roles within families. The researchers looked at people from two different generations—while each was ages 25–47—to better understand generational shifts in charitable behavior. For Gen X/millennial married couples whose giving decisions are influenced by women, the estimate of the amount of giving is higher than that of their pre-boomer counterparts. For Gen X/millennial married couples whose giving decisions are made by men only, the estimate of giving is lower than that of their pre-baby boom counterparts.

The bottom line is that women's influence in charitable giving is on the rise—and the dollars are following. Women are prone to give more. ■

**KATHLEEN E. LOEHR** is the principal of Kathleen Loehr & Associates, a philanthropy and leadership practice. This article is excerpted from *Gender Matters: A Guide to Growing Women's Philanthropy* (CASE, 2018). To purchase a copy, visit [case.org/books](http://case.org/books). Use the code "currents" to get 10 percent off.