

SIGNALS IN FUNDRAISING

Women in Philanthropy

The future of philanthropy is being shaped by women. As wealth and influence shift into women's hands, their collaborative, values-based, and impact-focused approach is redefining how and why people give. Explore the trends driving women's philanthropy today and the practical steps nonprofits can take to engage this powerful force for change.

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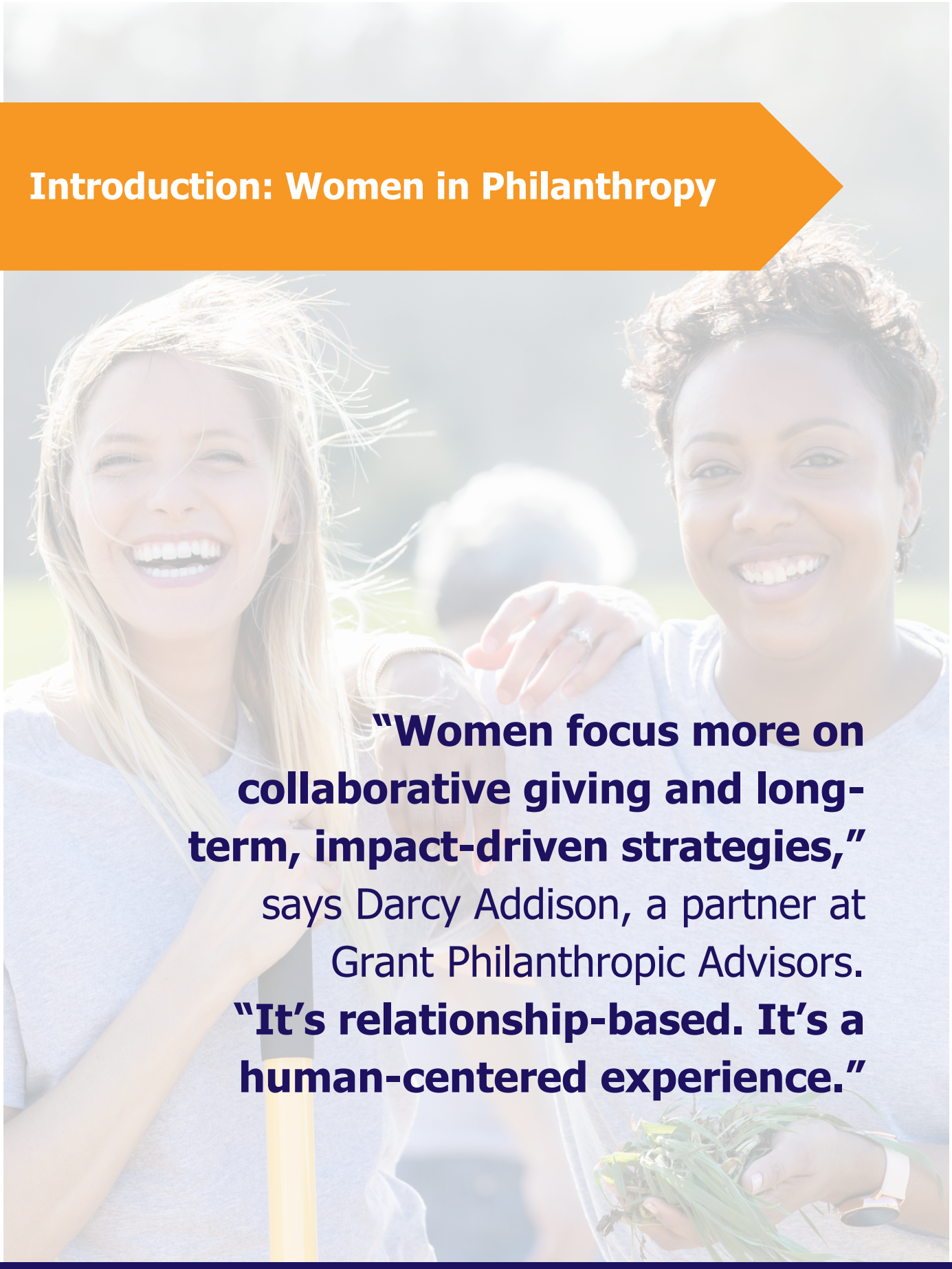
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Introduction: Women in Philanthropy



"Women focus more on collaborative giving and long-term, impact-driven strategies," says Darcy Addison, a partner at Grant Philanthropic Advisors. **"It's relationship-based. It's a human-centered experience."**

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Introduction: Women in Philanthropy

Rising Influence

Though long outnumbered in the field, women have been at the heart of philanthropy for more than a century. In the early 1880s, Clara Barton founded the American Red Cross to help the injured in war zones and victims of natural disasters.

That same decade, reformer Jane Addams founded Chicago's Hull House to strengthen educational programs for the working poor.

In recent years, however, women have amassed much more wealth and, with it, greater control over the philanthropic purse strings. More committed givers and foundation heads are women than ever before, and their preferences are guiding ongoing shifts in how philanthropy is done.





Bottom line: Women have long been central to philanthropy, and today their growing wealth and leadership are giving them unprecedented power to shape how philanthropy works and where resources go.

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Why Women's Philanthropy Matters



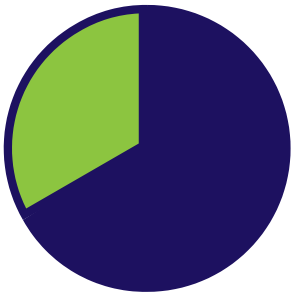
Women are already the primary decision-makers in household giving and as trillions in assets shift into their hands, they will increasingly own the future of philanthropic capital.

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Why Women's Philanthropy Matters

Giving Influence & the Wealth Transfer



Women control 1/3 of U.S. wealth

Women currently control about one-third of U.S. wealth—around $18 trillion—and in affluent households, they make or influence 85 percent of charitable giving decisions. Their financial power is growing: McKinsey projects that women will control $34 trillion in investable assets by 2030, and estimates from the Great Wealth Transfer suggest more than $84 trillion will move to heirs by 2045, with women expected to inherit over half.

$84+ trillion will move to heirs by 2045, with women expected to inherit over half



Women have 85% influence in giving decisions

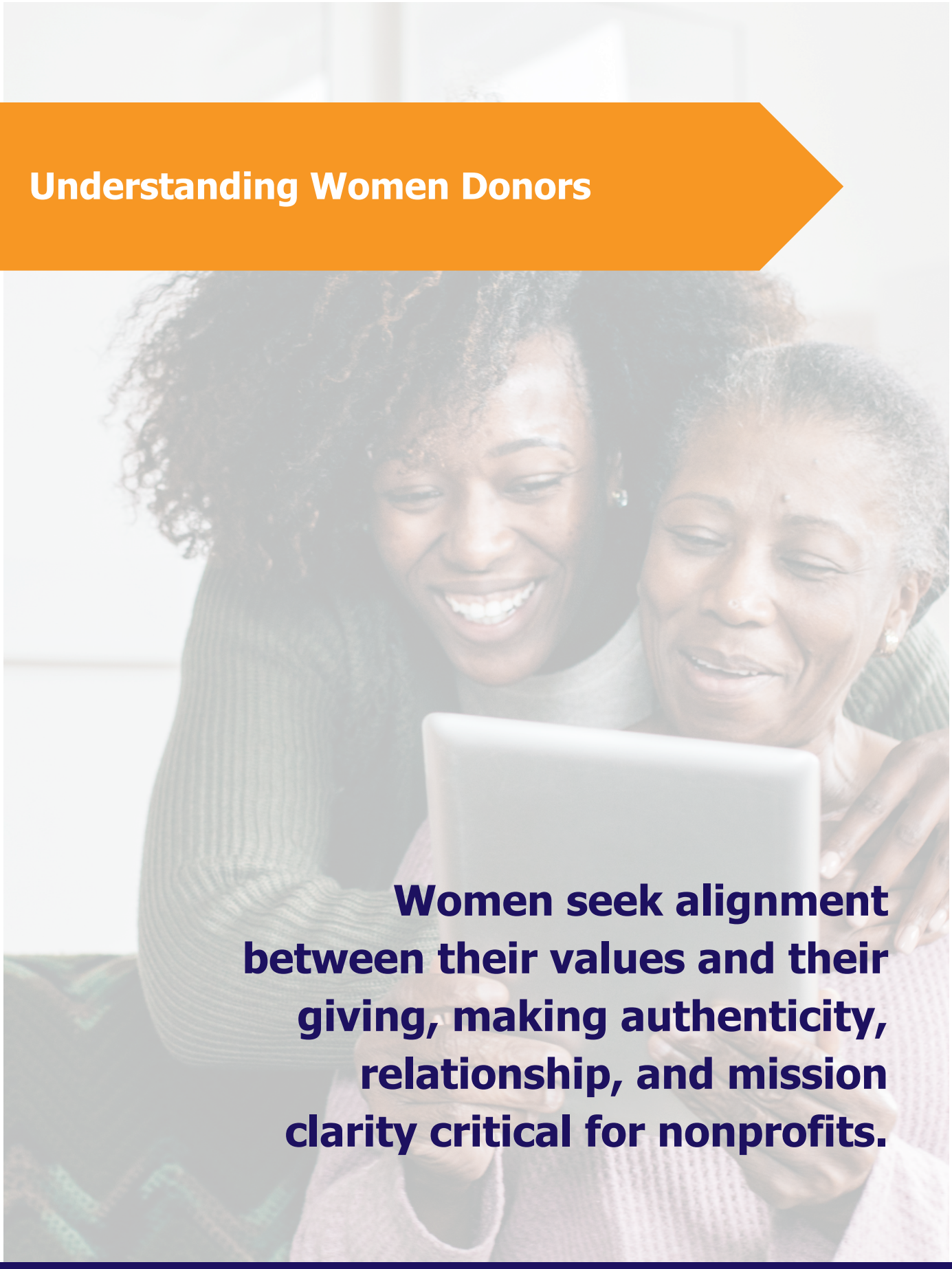
Women's giving has also proven more resilient than men's; declines in participation have been slower and less pronounced, and during COVID-19, single women increased their average gift amounts even as participation dipped. Taken together, women are not only shaping household giving today, they are on track to hold much of the philanthropic capital of tomorrow.

IMPLICATION

Women are already the primary decision-makers in household giving and as trillions in assets shift into their hands, they will increasingly own the future of philanthropic capital.

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Understanding Women Donors



Women seek alignment between their values and their giving, making authenticity, relationship, and mission clarity critical for nonprofits.

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Understanding Women Donors

Why Women Give

Women's philanthropy is deeply rooted in values, relationships, and lived experience. Research consistently shows that women are more likely to give based on:

- Empathy and care for others
- Desire for social change and equity
- Connection to community and personal experience

Women often view philanthropy not as charity, but as a tool for systems-level change—addressing root causes rather than symptoms. They are also motivated by:

- Desire to create a meaningful, lasting impact
- A sense of responsibility to give back
- Interest in engaging family and future generations



IMPLICATION

Women seek alignment between their values and their giving, making authenticity and mission clarity critical for nonprofits.

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Understanding Women Donors

How Women Give

Relationally

Women are relational, not transactional. They prioritize relationships with organizations. They want to feel:

- Connected to the mission
- Valued as partners
- Informed about impact

Broadly

Women prefer broad and distributed giving. While individual gifts may be smaller, the lifetime value and cumulative impact are substantial. They tend to:

- Support more organizations
- Give more frequently
- Spread gifts across causes rather than concentrating them

Collaboratively

Women are collaborative and network-driven. This requires a shift from "ask-focused" fundraising to engagement-focused stewardship. Women are significantly more likely to:

- Participate in giving circles
- Give alongside peers
- Share knowledge and influence others

Beyond Money

Women are usually engaged beyond money. They often contribute across multiple dimensions, including:

- Time (volunteering)
- Talent (expertise, leadership)
- Networks (introductions, advocacy)

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Understanding Women Donors

How Women Give

Studies have shown that women are **more likely to give to charity** than men, though men sometimes make bigger individual contributions. In general, women also **score higher on empathy scales** than men, an outlook that may lead them to support nonprofits that help the most vulnerable.



Women's giving ventures tend to be more inspired by their organic social ties. Every day, female givers are **more likely to support nonprofits whose founders they know personally and whose impact they have seen close up.** And not only do existing relationships motivate female givers, but those relationships often strengthen over the course of their giving.

IMPLICATION

Nonprofits that treat women as relational, collaborative partners—and value their time, talent, networks, and lived experience alongside their gifts—unlock deeper engagement and greater lifetime impact.

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Understanding Women Donors

Where Women Give

Women’s philanthropy is not only growing in scale; it is also becoming more defined by the causes women choose to support.

According to the Women's Philanthropy Institute's 2025 Women & Girls Index, giving to organizations serving women and girls exceeded 2% of all U.S. charitable giving in both 2022 and 2023, representing **more than $11 billion annually**. The Index includes 57,165 organizations and uses finalized IRS data from 2022–2023.

That growth points to a larger trend: younger high-net-worth women are directing more of their giving toward social change, including human rights, climate change, homelessness, and the advancement of women and girls.

2%+ of Total Giving Across 57,165 Orgs

$11B+

Women’s & Girl’s Organizations



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Understanding Women Donors

Where Women Give

Women's giving priorities reflect both personal experience and broader societal concerns. Common focus areas include:

- Education
- Health & Healthcare Access
- Women and Girls
- Social Justice & Equity
- Community-based Services

Women are also more likely to:

- Support underfunded or grassroots organizations
- Invest in long-term systemic solutions
- Fund causes that align with identity and lived experience

Increasingly, women are directing resources toward:

- Gender Equity
- Racial Justice
- Economic Mobility
- Community Resilience

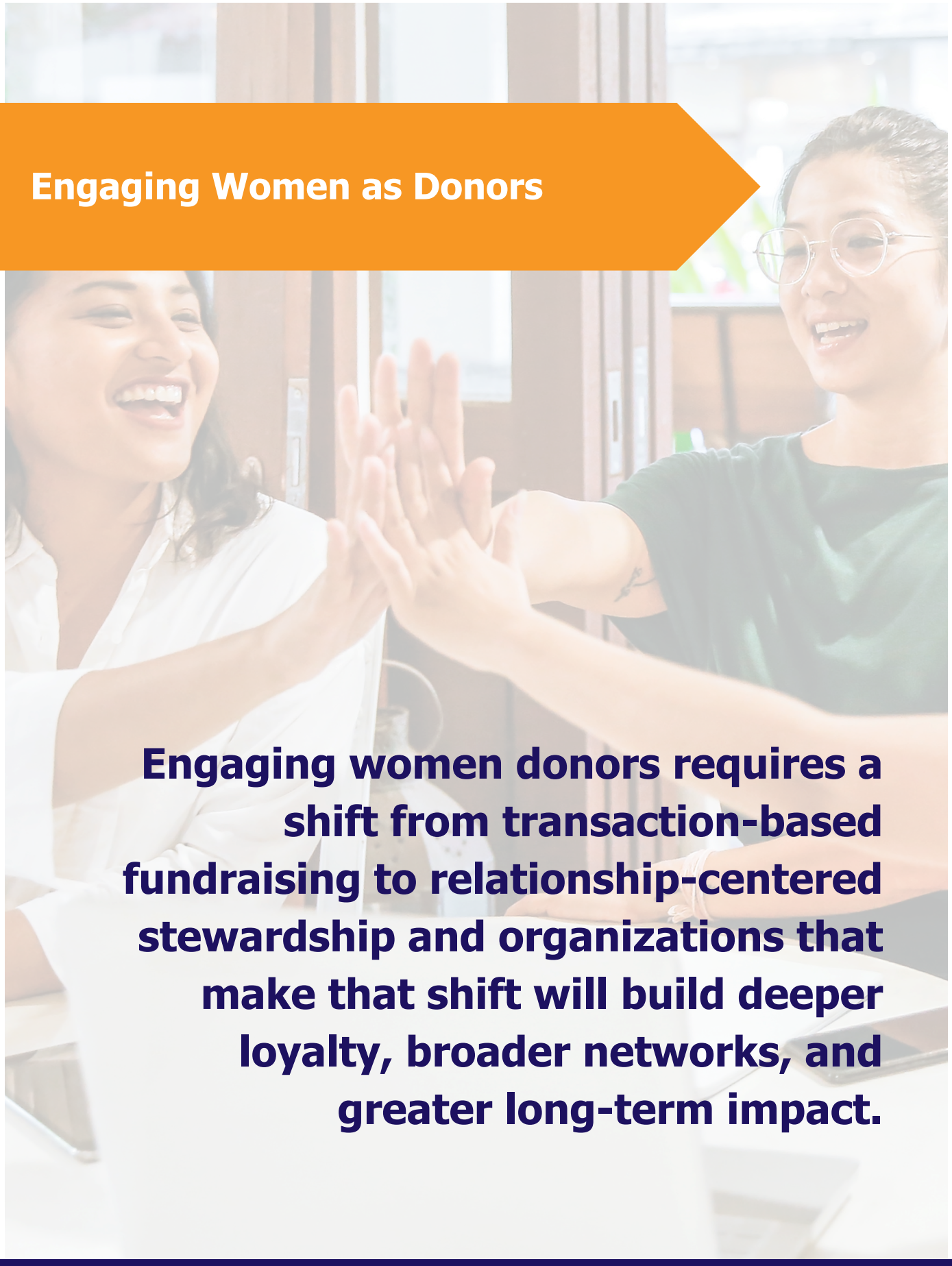


IMPLICATION

Women are directing philanthropy toward equity, community, and systems change. Organizations that align with those priorities will be better positioned to earn their support.

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Engaging Women as Donors



Engaging women donors requires a shift from transaction-based fundraising to relationship-centered stewardship and organizations that make that shift will build deeper loyalty, broader networks, and greater long-term impact.

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Engaging Women as Donors

From Transaction to Relationship

Philanthropy and fundraising models have historically been designed around traditional giving patterns—transactional, recognition-driven, and institution-focused. As a result, many organizations are under-engaging women donors, missing both immediate and long-term philanthropic potential.

Engaging women donors is not simply an equity issue—it is a strategic imperative. Organizations that successfully align with women's philanthropic preferences will benefit from:

- Higher participation rates (women are more likely to give than men)
- Greater donor loyalty and long-term engagement
- Broader networks and peer-driven giving expansion
- Increased impact through collaborative and values-driven philanthropy

Women Are More Than a Niche

Women are not a niche segment of philanthropy—they represent its present and future. Their growing economic power, combined with distinct approaches to giving, is reshaping how philanthropy operates. Nonprofits that recognize and respond to these differences will not only raise more resources but also build stronger, more sustainable, and more impactful relationships.



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Engaging Women as Donors

A Practical Roadmap for Engagement

To effectively engage women donors, nonprofits must rethink traditional fundraising approaches. The following provides a practical roadmap:



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Engaging Women as Donors

Lead with Listening, Not Asking



Start with conversations about values, goals, and impact

Ask: "What change do you want to see in the world?"

Avoid leading with a funding request

Build Authentic, Long-Term Relationships



Treat donors as partners, not transactions

Provide ongoing, meaningful updates

Demonstrate impact in ways that connect emotionally and concretely

Emphasize Impact and Storytelling



Share real stories of lives changed

Show cause-and-effect outcomes, not just outputs

Connect the donor directly to the impact of their gift

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Engaging Women as Donors

Create Opportunities for Engagement



Invite women to serve on committees

Invite women to participate in strategy discussion

Move beyond writing checks to co-creation

Invite women to engage in site visits or learning experiences

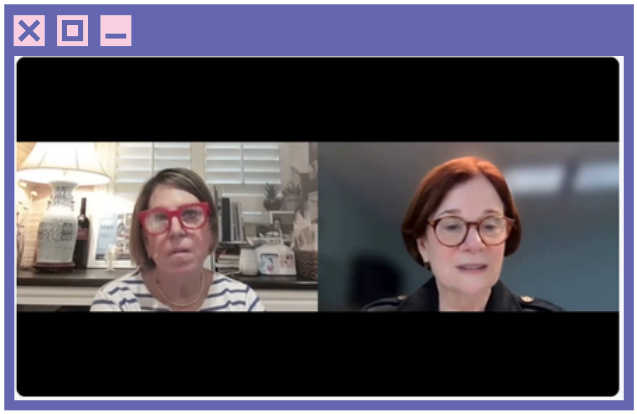
Leverage Networks and Community



Encourage peer-to-peer engagement

Develop or partner with giving circles

Recognize the power of social influence in women's giving



BONUS VIDEO!

Watch this 16-minute video interview with Lanier Brown May, Senior Regional Development Officer (retired) and Founder of the Carolina Women's Leadership Council at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (click image on left to view)

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Engaging Women as Donors

Personalize Communication



Avoid generic outreach

Tailor messaging to interests, life stage, and values

Ensure communications reflect inclusion and respect

Recognize the Full Spectrum of Giving



Value contributions beyond money, including expertise, advocacy, and leadership

Celebrate holistic engagement

Adapt Organizational Mindsets



Ensure women are visible in leadership, donor recognition, and campaign strategy

Challenge assumptions about wealth and gender

Train staff on gender-informed fundraising approaches

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Supportive Resources

Key Women's Giving Organizations & Networks

- **Philanos:** A major network for women's giving circles and collective giving groups,
- representing over 17,500 women and 70+ affiliates
- **Women's Funding Network (WFN):** A global organization of 100+ women's funds and foundations, focused on systemic gender and racial equality
- **Impact100:** A global organization where women donate $1,000 to a pool for large
- $100,000 grants, fostering local community impact
- **Women United (United Way):** A global network of women leaders within local United Way branches focused on education, financial stability, and health
- **The X Fund:** A women's giving circle housed at the Liberty Hill Foundation
- **Black Trans Lives Thrive Giving Circle:** A national network of 336 members

Key Giving Circles & Focused Philanthropy

- **Women's Giving Circles:** Local groups that combine donations to fund community projects, such as the Women's Giving Circle of the Community Giving Foundation
- **Grapevine:** An online platform that hosts a directory for finding local giving circles

Focus Areas and Impact

- **Local Focus:** Many groups target local nonprofits serving women and families
- **Human Rights:** Roughly 35% of giving circle funds are directed toward racial and
- gender equity
- **Economic Empowerment:** Organizations like the various Women's Foundations provide grants aimed at shifting economic, social, and political systems
- **Collective Action:** 60% of all collective giving in 2023 came from women-only giving circles, with more than 4,000 circles moving $3 billion to various causes since 2017

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SOURCES

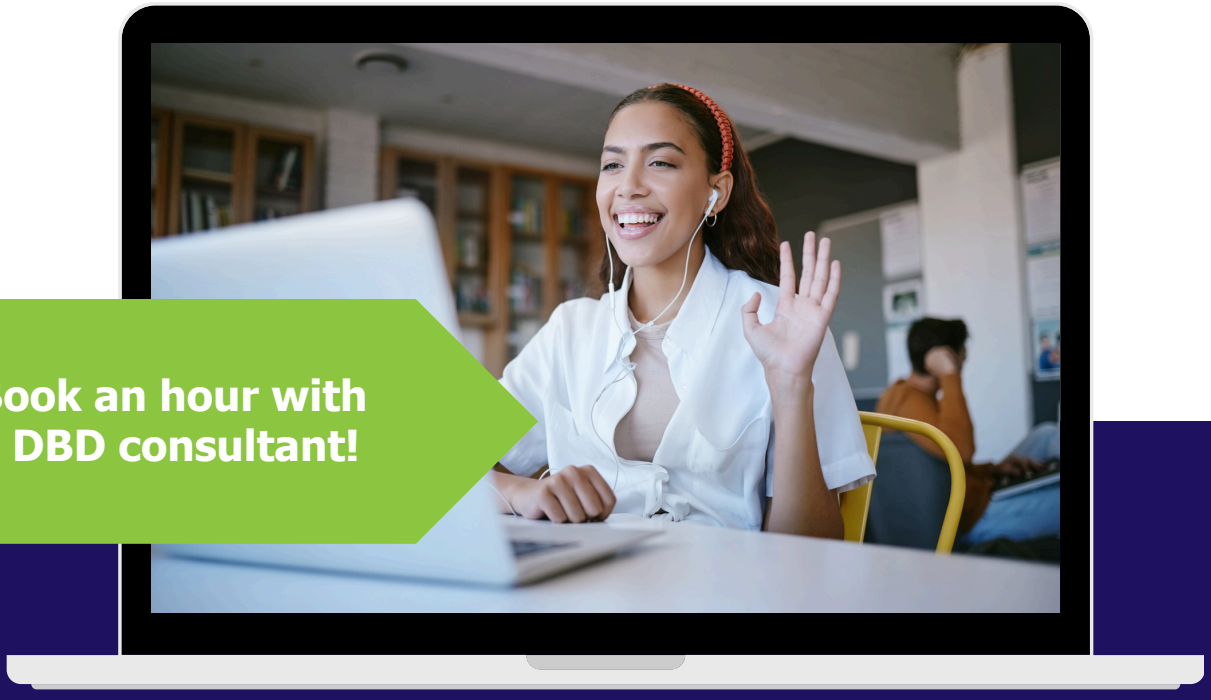
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- The Boston Globe, **The Future of Philanthropy is Female**
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Book an hour with a DBD consultant!

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