



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS  
OF TEXAS EDUCATION FUND

## Engaging Millennials

### Table of Contents

Millennial Voters .....	2
Characteristics of the Millennial Generation .....	3
Tips for Engaging Young Adults .....	3
References .....	4





# Characteristics of the Millennial Generation

The oldest millennials reached adulthood in 1981 while the youngest came of age in 2016—a span of 35 years. The generation includes recent high school graduates to young families. Thus millennials have widely diverse worldviews, shaped by vastly different life experiences, economic conditions, and political milieus. And, it is the most ethnically/racially and culturally diverse generation in U.S. history.<sup>11</sup>

A distinctive affinity with technology pervades millennial culture. While older generations have had to adapt to the Internet, email, texting, instant messaging, YouTube, and social media as they became available, millennials have grown up in the digital age.<sup>12,13</sup> What may appear as an addiction to smartphones is actually the need to be constantly gaining and sharing the latest information important to them. Viewing anyone as an equal, regardless of age or status, coincides with the nonhierarchical, free-flowing nature of digital communication. Being able to readily quickly digitize their own stories, personal feelings, and opinions to others exudes honesty rather than emotion and prioritizes success as experiential rather than material or status achievement.<sup>14</sup>

The millennial era economic environment has produced a tendency for personal needs to take precedence over traditional organizational structures and place high value on personal relationships and work-life balance.<sup>12</sup> To be motivated to become involved in an activity, whether paid or volunteer work, requires a sense of purpose, fitting in, and making an impact.<sup>15,16</sup>

## Tips for Engaging Young Adults

**Strategy is more important than tactics.** **1<sup>st</sup>**, talking with young adults (rather than at them) is key to acknowledging that they matter. Interaction is essential. **2<sup>nd</sup>**, whatever the means of communication, its message must have meaning for its target to inspire action. They'll be asking, "So what?" In other words, your mission matters.<sup>17</sup> Whatever the event:

1. ***It's got to be authentic.*** Before trying to lead young people, spend some time getting to know them—ask questions, listen to their stories, and use first names. Tell your story—how you've tried and failed, what you've questioned and feared, and how you are trying to overcome your current challenges.<sup>15</sup>
2. ***It's got to be meaningful.*** Whatever is posted, shared, created, displayed, or performed must have relevance to its audience.<sup>17</sup> Make the story about your cause—the work your organization does and how it makes an impact.<sup>18</sup>
3. ***It's got to be interactive.*** Young people prefer active and experiential types of learning. Programs and conferences that incorporate group discussions, roundtables, debates, interactive chats, and hands-on activities encourage participation and retain focus. Build a discussion board into online learning. Ask for their opinions and feedback.<sup>13,19</sup>
4. ***It's got to get to the point.*** Your communications are competing with texts, tweets, emails, instant messages, headlines, and multi-tasking. Verbose voicemails, emails, and lectures get tuned out. Vague, indirect messages waste time.<sup>15</sup> Short, but relatively frequent, focused and interesting snippets about your cause will get attention.<sup>20</sup>
5. ***It's got to be social and mobile.*** A presence on multiple social media channels is essential. Readability must be optimized for mobile devices.<sup>12</sup> Variety is the spice of life—so vary the content of messages from one to another: Text, photos, infographics, and short videos.<sup>20</sup> Tap into their techy side wherever possible.<sup>19</sup>
6. ***It's got to be flexible.*** Adapt to your audience and their schedule: Meet on their turf, create choices of opportunities, allow self-paced learning, and encourage self-direction in solving problems—create an environment where they engage themselves.<sup>13</sup>
7. ***It's got to be fun!*** Competitive cooperation is motivating—gamify what otherwise might be dull with points, badges, leaderboards, and other team dimensions.<sup>13</sup> Mix in play, games, or entertainment. And be sure there are visually appealing opportunities for selfies to share with friends.<sup>19</sup>

8. **Location, location, location!** Go where young people hang out.<sup>21</sup>
- *Sites:* College and high school campus dining rooms, snack bars, book stores, classrooms; bars, clubs, coffee shops, theaters, barber/beauty shops, transit centers, churches, city parks
  - *Events:* Sporting events, festivals, concerts
  - *Don't forget the incentives and photo-ops!*
    - Free food and drinks
    - Swag—wacky, fun memorabilia—water bottles, tee shirts, hats, sunglasses, bags, coupons, etc.
    - Pet-the-puppy—millennials love dogs, so have your volunteers bring their dogs to the event to engage young people in conversation and take a selfie.<sup>22</sup>

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