

When Young People Give Philanthropy Back Its Meaning and Momentum

Quand les jeunes redonnent le sens et l'élan attendu à la philanthropie

November 25, 2025 · By Daniel H. Lanteigne

This is an AI-generated English translation of Daniel H. Lanteigne's original French-language column, provided for reference. Read the original in French on Les Affaires → <https://www.lesaffaires.com/dossiers/philanthropie-automne-2025/quand-les-jeunes-redonnent-le-sens-et-lelan-attendu-a-la-philanthropie/>

There's a lot of talk about the challenges facing the philanthropic sector. Increased pressure, insufficient funding, overworked teams and growing distrust are among the recurring findings.

I am, in fact, an outspoken critic who believes the sector needs to better regulate itself and face its own limits head-on.

But amid all these findings, there is a bright spot—and it's a strong one. Young people are changing the game. They're far more engaged than we think—to the point of profoundly changing the narrative.

An Engaged Generation We Don't See Enough Of

According to the latest Léger–Institut Mallet survey on the next generation of philanthropy in Quebec, conducted among 1,000 Quebecers aged 18 to 40, 87% took at least one philanthropic action in the past year. That's huge!

And it gives us pause, especially in a context where donations are declining, needs are exploding and a massive transfer of wealth is getting underway.

The recent Institut Mallet survey confirms what many suspected, and goes further. Yes, young people give in different ways (money, goods, time, expertise), but above all

according to their values and their proximity to the issues. The causes that dominate? Vulnerable children, mental health and education, with a marked priority for mental health among 18- to 24-year-olds.

In other words, sensitive, human causes, deeply rooted in this generation's realities. After the era when donations were expected in a small wicker basket passed along church pews, then, often, in reaction to unbearable situations, are we now witnessing the emergence of an era of philanthropic coherence more deeply embodied than ever before? The question is worth asking.

A Philanthropic Impostor Syndrome?

Despite their high level of participation, two perceptions persist. Nearly 66% believe their actions aren't "important enough," and 50% still feel that philanthropy is reserved for more established people.

A generation that contributes, yet doubts its own legitimacy. That's the heart of the problem. As if young people's philanthropic momentum were being slowed by the fear of never doing enough.

This "philanthropic impostor" complex serves no one. Not young people, not organizations, not communities. Our society doesn't have the luxury of turning away a gift, whatever its nature or size, because of a discourse tinged with "philanthropic snobbery."

Because yes, the traditional model still places a lot of value on major gifts and big galas. No one is questioning that—it's obviously essential. But it's important to understand that young people, even if they may not have the financial means of their elders, give with just as much enthusiasm, if not more. They are philanthropists. Without a doubt.

Let's stop making them doubt themselves or minimizing what they contribute. By constantly sidelining them, we're shooting ourselves in the foot. Ignoring them now means missing tomorrow's turning point.

An Uninhibited Philanthropy

The next generation doesn't wait to be ready, established, or even invited to the table. They get involved right away, in concrete ways. That takes shape through an impromptu fundraiser among coworkers, a few hours of volunteering, buying a food basket for a family, a one-time online donation, or offering professional expertise to an organization.

This kind of philanthropy doesn't always fit traditional parameters, but it's alive, embodied, and concrete. It isn't opposed to the current model—it broadens its horizons.

Their commitment, then, isn't measured only in dollars, but in coherence.

Passing On a Culture of Philanthropy Earlier

Another striking figure from the survey: 86% of young people want philanthropy to be part of the school curriculum. For them, it isn't an act reserved for the elite, but a social reflex that should be cultivated from childhood.

They see it as a way to better understand the role of organizations, to reinforce the habit of giving, and to embed solidarity into everyday life from an early age.

It's, in a way, a means of democratizing philanthropy, of freeing it from the overly narrow framework it's still sometimes confined to.

What If the Sector Seized This Opportunity?

Yes, philanthropy has its challenges. But this survey is a reminder of something essential: the next generation is already here.

It isn't seeking the same recognition as major donors. This isn't a competition. The next generation simply wants to be recognized, listened to, and valued for what it already contributes. Its way of giving is different. And that's a good thing. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts—does that ring a bell?

What If Philanthropy's Future Were Written With Them... and Thanks to Them?

At a time when needs are exploding, this generation's engagement is undoubtedly one of the most encouraging signs of recent years. Young people aren't turning away from social issues. They're carrying them in their own way.

And that way is neither better nor worse. It's simply different, necessary... and full of potential.

Perhaps this is exactly what philanthropy needed: a reminder that commitment isn't measured by prestige, but by participation. That the sector's future depends as much on its ability to evolve as on its willingness to welcome and amplify the momentum young people are already carrying.

By listening to them, including them and valuing their actions—small or large—we don't just preserve philanthropy. We renew it. And between you and me, it's about time.

Link to the survey results: <https://institutmallet.org/nouvelle/sondage-la-releve-en-philanthropie-au-quebec/>

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