

EXIT INTERVIEW

Women Donors Are Stepping Up — and Nonprofits Need to Tailor Their Approaches to Reach Them, Says Longtime Leader

By *Rasheeda Childress*

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Donna Hall, CEO of the Women Donors Network, says women are more excited than ever to give after enduring the pandemic, social-justice concerns, and environmental turmoil of the past few years.

When [Donna Hall](#) started as CEO of the Women Donors Network in 2002, George W. Bush was president, the iPhone hadn't been invented, and the stock market was trying to recover from the burst of the dot-com bubble. A lot has changed in the world since then, particularly in the realm of women's philanthropy.

The *Chronicle* chatted with Hall, who retired from WDN in September, about the changes she's seen over the past 20 years, advice on how charities can effectively approach women donors, and what challenges lie ahead.

Women Emerge From the Shadows

One of the most notable changes Hall has seen is women donors stepping into the spotlight. In the past, she said, they were most interested in making a difference, not being publicly lauded for their donations.

"They haven't really searched for things that give them a lot of fanfare, like names on buildings," Hall said. "There was a lot more funding of basic services. There's a lot more being willing to take credit for the work, rather than just hanging back and giving anonymous donations."

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Philanthropists like MacKenzie Scott and Melinda French Gates are serving as inspiration for women today who want to give. "They are wonderful emerging leaders who talk openly about the gift of being able to give, the importance of doing it well, and really taking a level, thoughtful, strategic approach to doing it," Hall said.

Strategic giving, Hall said, recognizes that the problems charities are trying to solve are complex and difficult, requiring a long-term approach, not just an immediate influx of dollars and support services.

"Women — and men, too — are much more strategic now in asking themselves, 'What can we do to bring about systemic change, and how do things relate to one another?'" Hall said. "In earlier years, even at WDN,

patience, time, and research to really address and solve intractable problems that philanthropy can help to touch.”

Charities Should Tailor Approaches

While fundraisers have often focused on the men who have relished taking credit for giving, women will be the most prolific donors moving forward. Research shows women donors will control [70 percent of the \\$41 trillion](#) available to be contributed over the next decades, according to Boston College’s Center on Wealth and Philanthropy. So Hall had some tips for charities approaching women philanthropists.

“One of the things [charities] have to start thinking about is, What does it mean to be in partnership with philanthropists?” Hall said. “People, women in particular, are not interested in just giving money. They’re interested in partnerships that really are much more equal in nature.”

She said many WDN donors are interested in giving time, expertise, and other nonmonetary support, so organizations need to be open to a wide array of assistance. That being said, women donors are more excited than ever to give after enduring the pandemic, social-justice concerns, and environmental turmoil of the past few years.

“Given everything that has gone on in the last two or three years, our members feel an urgency to step up their giving,” Hall said. “If we don’t figure out how to address some of the problems that are now being faced — whether it’s the reversal of *Roe v. Wade*, whether it’s climate change, whether it’s environmental disasters for other reasons, whether it’s economic inequity — if we don’t step up the work that we’re doing and figure out some key answers, there’s a lot of very negative things coming our way.”

Looking Ahead

The changes of the past 20 years have been tremendous, and moving forward, Hall sees challenges and opportunities.

The most immediate challenge organizations face is economic uncertainty, which Hall said is leading charities to wonder if they can depend on their donors to continue to give. “One challenge is to help those who can make multiyear commitments and keep them so that these organizations can continue to do their work over a sustained period,” she said. “The kind of change we’re looking for doesn’t come in six months or a year.”

Moving forward, Hall sees an opportunity in giving more women donors the chance to work together.

“Women are collaborative by nature; they like making group decisions,” Hall said. “Our women really like

women, and it's economically advantageous. When people join together and they send one large gift instead of 100 small ones, that makes a lot less work for any particular organization."

Finally, Hall said, an opportunity lies ahead for more donors to adopt trust-based philanthropy.

"Trust-based philanthropy means recognizing — in a way we traditionally have not as philanthropists — that the people we're serving know better what they need and how to bring it about than we do," she said. "We need to reach levels of comfort on both sides of the coin so that our grantees feel like they're getting what they need and our donors feel like they're getting what they need."

That's a challenge, too, because it's different from the traditional model where funders often attach constricting conditions on how their money should be spent.

"There's a lot of stress involved in making that shift," Hall said. "It's hard to give up control, and it's hard to take control when you haven't had it before."

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FEMALE DONORS

FUNDRAISING FROM INDIVIDUALS



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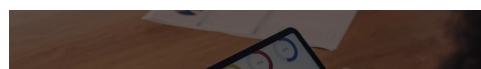
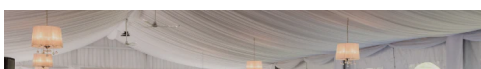
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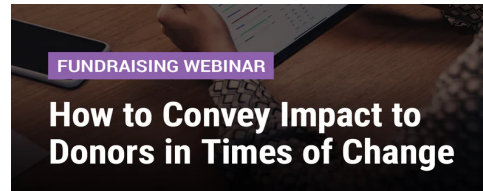


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