

# UNDERSTANDING GIVING: ACROSS GENERATIONS

A REPORT OF THE COLORADO GENEROSITY PROJECT

In *Understanding Giving: Beliefs & Behaviors of Colorado's Donors*, we explored what, how, and why Coloradans give. The report was based on a wealth of research, most of which was conducted by Colorado Nonprofit Association in 2011 through a phone survey and focus groups around the state.

In this article, we'll look more deeply at what our research taught us about the generational differences in Coloradans' giving beliefs and behaviors. We'll begin with an overview of how and what people give, the amounts they donate and the causes they support, then investigate generational differences in donors' most basic beliefs about nonprofits and giving. Finally, we'll look at the types of connections people have with nonprofits and causes: the actions and experiences that lead them to give.

In our 2011 phone survey, we tracked three separate age groups: donors age 18-44, age 45-64, and age 65 and up. The observations in this article are based entirely on the research results for these three age groups.

This article is the first in a series of in-depth pieces that will study the demographics, trends, and themes that emerged from our research into *Understanding Giving*.

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## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit [www.ColoradoNonprofits.org/Understanding-Giving](http://www.ColoradoNonprofits.org/Understanding-Giving) for the full report, *Understanding Giving: Beliefs & Behaviors of Colorado's Donors*. You'll also find supplemental and detailed data, regional reports, and a schedule of our upcoming trainings.



## Generational Differences: How & What People Give

In this section, we look at how much people give – in a single donation and as an annual total – and factors such as the number and types of causes they support, and the types of donations they make.

### Coloradans age 18-44:

- Tend to make higher-dollar donations. When asked about the approximate value of their most recent donation, 18 percent reported a donation of more than \$500 dollars. (37 percent reported a donation of less than \$50.)
- Give generously overall. Fifty-three percent said they had made donations totaling more than \$500 in the past 12 months, with 34 percent reporting \$1,000 or more in annual donations.
- Are by far the most likely to report buying products from a business that donates some of its proceeds to charity (65 percent).
- Are most likely to report giving through a payroll deduction at work (20 percent).

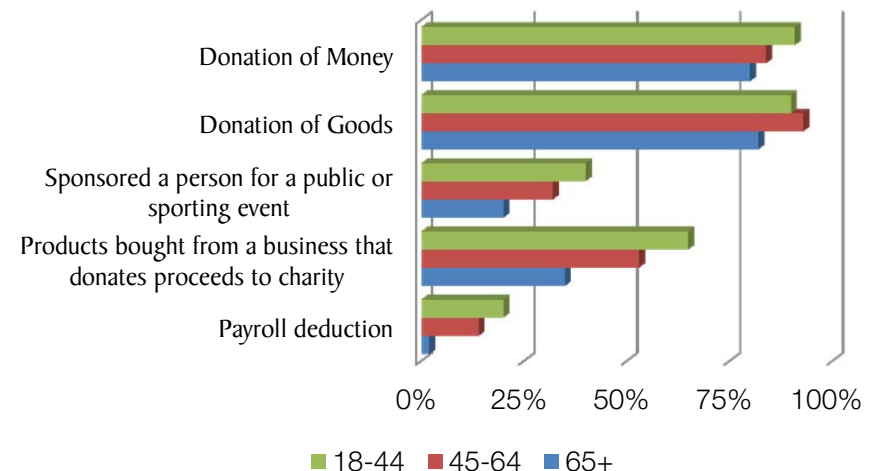
### Coloradans age 45-64:

- Are less likely than donors age 18-44 to make a single high-dollar donation. Of donors age 45-64, 10 percent said their most recent donation was \$500 or more; 37 percent said it was less than \$50.
- Give generously overall; Fifty-five percent reporting making donations totaling more than \$500 in the past 12 months, and 36 percent said their donations in the past year totaled \$1,000 or more.
- Are most likely to make donations of goods (93 percent).

### Coloradans age 65 and up:

- Most often make lower-dollar donations, with 54 percent reporting their last donation was less than \$50.
- Are as likely as other groups to make total annual gifts at the highest end (30 percent say they give \$1,000 or more per year), although they are far less likely than other groups to report annual giving of at least \$500 (37 percent).
- Are most likely to purchase tickets to a fundraising event (42 percent).
- Are least likely to report making donations of money (80 percent), goods (82 percent), by sponsoring someone for an event (20 percent), or by purchasing from a business that donates some of its proceeds (35 percent).

Types of Donations Made in the Past 12 Months  
by Age Group



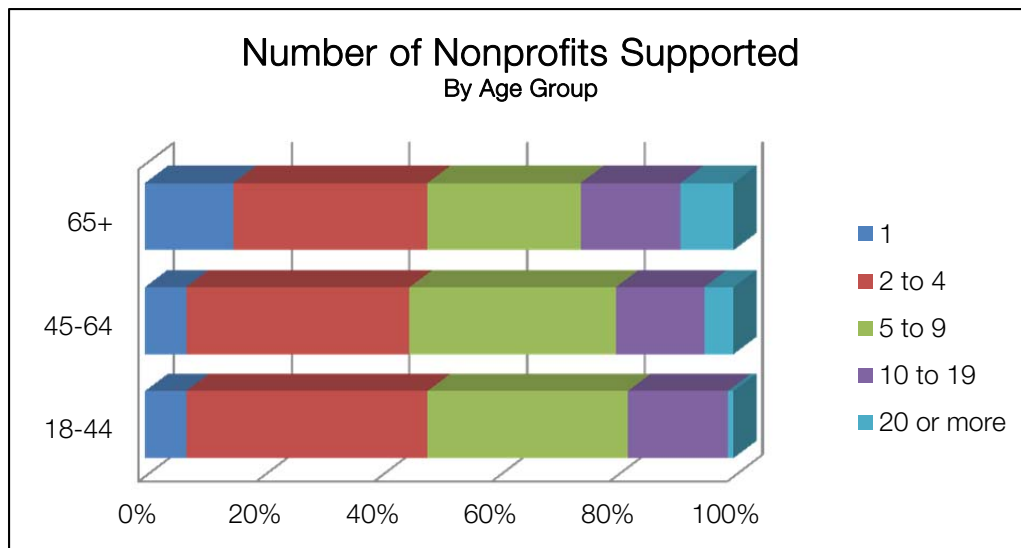
# Generational Differences: How & What People Give

## What Donors Support

We see that donors age 65 and up give generously, but tend to make single donations of lower dollar amounts than other age groups do. When we asked about the *number of nonprofits* that donors support, we found that this group was at least twice as likely as others to report supporting a very low *or* a very high number of charities.

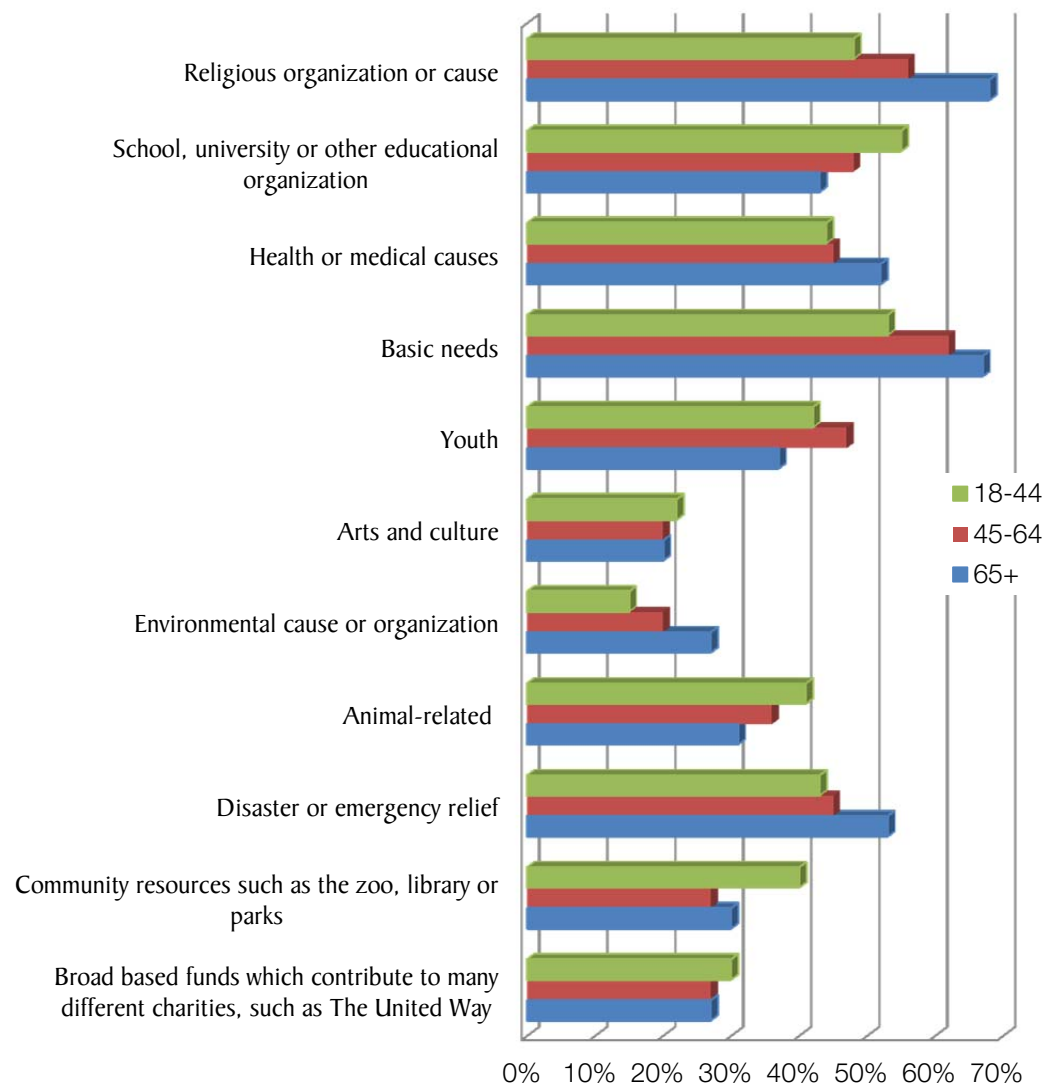
On the low end, 15 percent of donors age 65 and up say they support one charity, while only 7 percent of donors in both other age groups report supporting a single charity in a year. On the high end, 9 percent of donors age 65 and up say they support 20 or more charities (compared with 5 percent of donors age 45-64, and just 1 percent of donors age 18-44, who report this same number).

Our research also found generational differences in the *types of causes people support*. Donors age 65 and up are the group most likely to support religious organizations, basic needs, environmental causes, and disaster relief. The youngest group, age 18-44, is the age group most likely to support schools and universities, animal-related organizations, community resources, and (by a slim margin) arts and culture. Although donors age 45-64 represent a middle ground in most of these categories, they do emerge as the group most likely to support youth-related causes.



# Generational Differences: How & What People Give

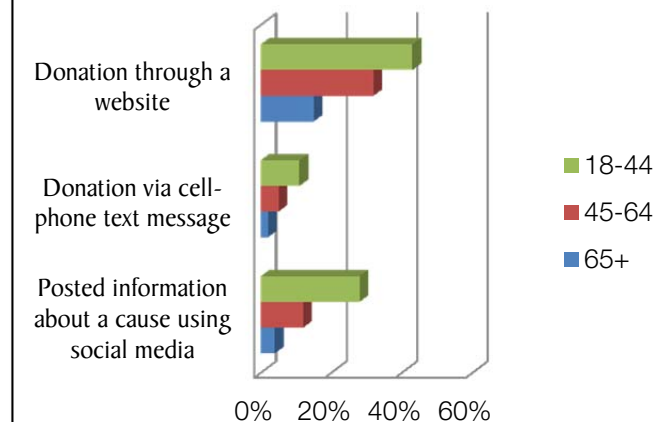
**Types of Causes Supported**  
By Age Group



## Online Giving

While the trend in nonprofit fundraising is to place more focus on social media and online giving in general, the minority of donors in all groups said they donated through websites or used social media to talk about nonprofit causes. Unsurprisingly, younger donors were more likely to have donated through a website or used social media in support of nonprofit causes.

**Online Giving & Activities**  
By Age Group



# Generational Differences: Beliefs about Nonprofits

### Coloradans age 18-44:

- Value nonprofits as advocates. Ninety-one percent agree that “charitable organizations play an important role in speaking out on important issues.”
- Do not view charities as an economic force. Less than half (48 percent) agree that “charitable organizations make up a significant portion of Colorado’s economy.”
- Are least likely to see nonprofit services as an important remedy to government spending cuts. Most believe “as the state government’s budget shrinks, charities are needed to provide more services,” but their 80 percent agreement rate was the lowest of the three age groups we studied.

### Coloradans age 45-64:

- Believe in supporting nonprofit. Fifty-seven percent strongly agree that “every person should support charitable causes in some way, either financially, or by donating time.”
- Trust nonprofits. Eighty percent agree that “most charities are honest and ethical in their use of donations.”
- See nonprofit and government services as linked. Ninety-one percent agree that “as the state government’s budget shrinks, charities are needed to provide more services,” and a majority (56 percent) strongly agree.

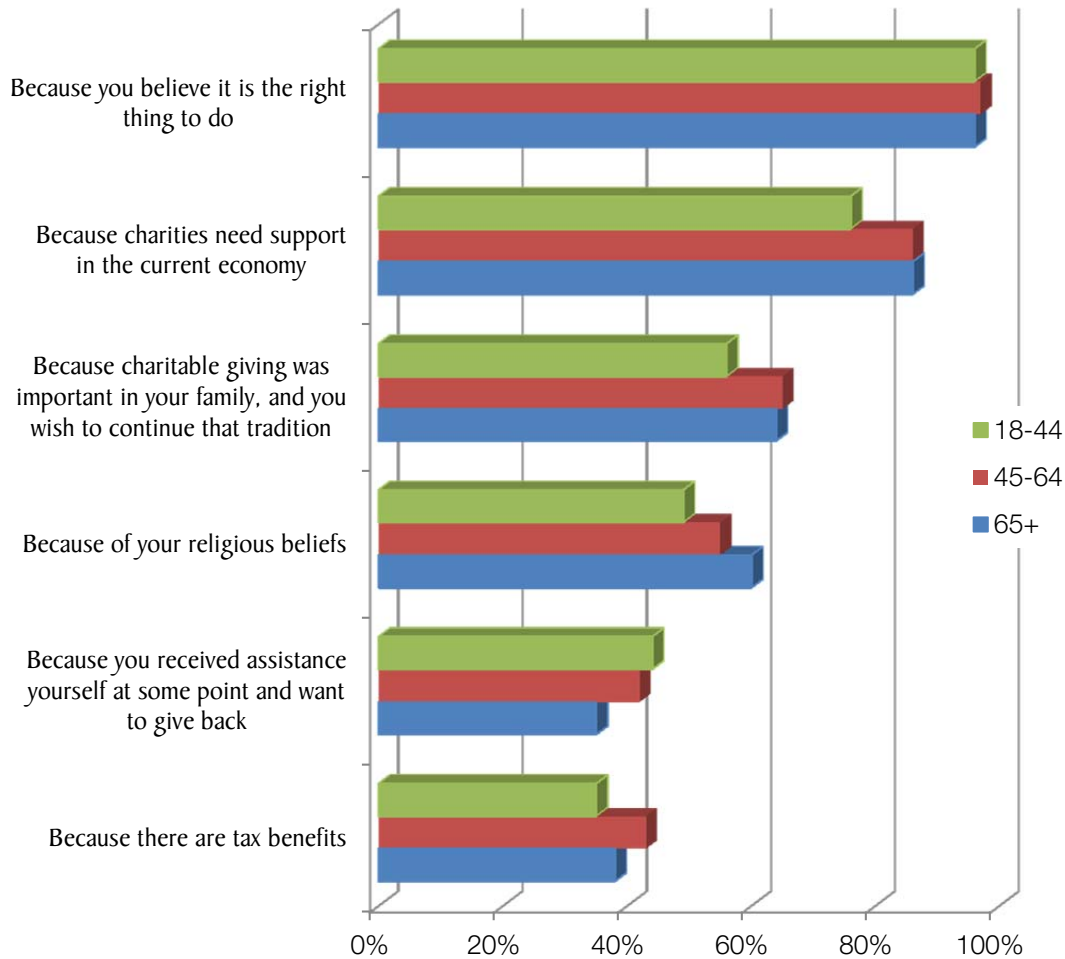
### Coloradans age 65 and up:

- View nonprofits as an economic force. Twenty-three percent strongly agree that “charitable organizations make up a significant portion of Colorado’s economy,” compared with only 15 percent of those in other age groups.
- Do not see nonprofits as advocates. Only 31 percent strongly agree that “charitable organizations play an important role in speaking out on important issues.”
- Are somewhat more skeptical of nonprofits than other groups. Seventy-two percent agree – and only 18 percent strongly agree – that “most charities are honest and ethical in their use of donations.”

# Generational Differences: Beliefs about Nonprofits

## Reasons for Donating

*Rated as "Very Important" or "Somewhat Important"  
Responses by Age Group*



## Reasons for Giving

Although people in different age groups tend to view nonprofits differently, their reasons for donating are remarkably similar. The most important reason for giving, by a wide margin, is because it's "the right thing to do" (96 percent agree). We asked donors about the importance of several other common reasons for giving – from religious beliefs to tax benefits – and donors continued to give similar answers, regardless of age.

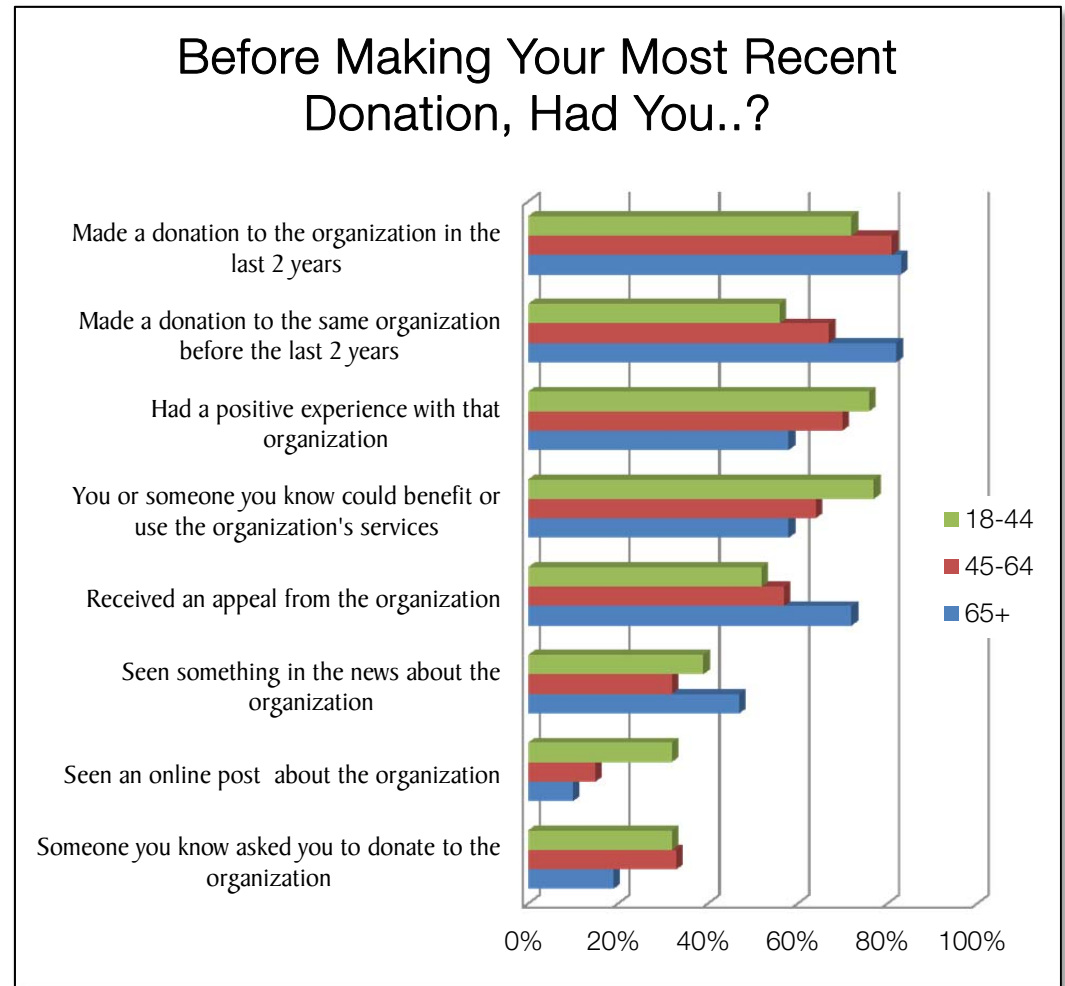
Not surprisingly, donors age 45-64 were most likely to say tax benefits were an important factor, although less than half (43 percent) said it was an important reason to donate. After agreeing that they give because "it's the right thing to do," donors age 18-44 were the group least likely to agree with nearly every other reason: helping charities in the current economy, continuing a family tradition, acting out religious beliefs, and claiming tax benefits. They're also the only age group who give because they "received assistance... at some point and want to give back" more often than because "there are tax benefits."

# Generational Differences: Connections

In this section, we explore ways in which nonprofits and donors forge connections with one another – how donors first interact with the organizations they support, which types of fundraising appeals and messages they respond to, and why they say they don't give more.

## Coloradans age 18-44:

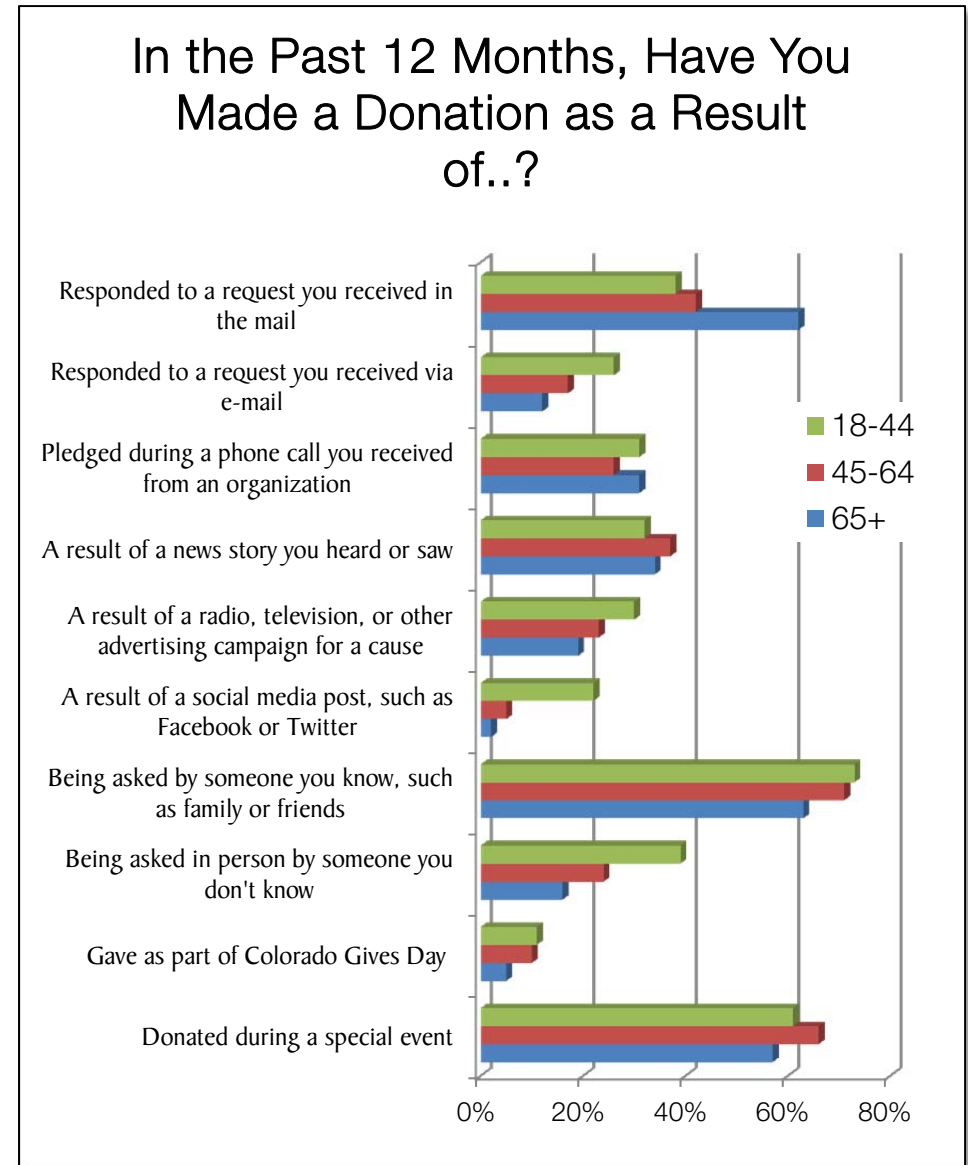
- Place a high value on personal connections with nonprofits; at 76 percent, this group was most likely to report their most recent donation going to an organization with which “you or someone you know had a good experience,” and 77 percent say they donated to a nonprofit that could benefit “you or someone you know.”
- Make donations when asked in person. When asked about gifts they’ve made in the past 12 months, 73 percent said they gave after being asked by someone they know, and 39 percent gave after being asked by someone they didn’t know – a rate 15 percent higher than donors age 45-64.
- Value efficiency. When asked about factors that influence their choice of nonprofits to support, 78 percent rank as “very important” the idea that a nonprofit is “well-managed and effective.”
- Are most likely to give online (43 percent say they’ve done this in the past 12 months), use social media to share information about a cause (28 percent), give in response to an email appeal (26 percent), give in response to a social media post (22 percent), and make a donation through cell phone text message (11 percent).
- Prefer more dramatic messages than the other age groups: 63 percent said they would be more likely to donate to an organization if they heard it was “in danger of closing due to funding shortages,” and 56 percent would be more likely to donate to an organization “poised to undertake a bold new project.”



# Generational Differences: Connections

## Coloradans age 45-64:

- Respond to personal appeals. Thirty-three percent say their most recent donation followed a request from someone they knew, and 71 percent say they've made such a gift sometime in the past 12 months.
- Donate through special events. Sixty-six percent report making these gifts in the past 12 months.
- Do not place as high a value on donor recognition as other groups. Only 16 percent said it was very important that "the organization thanks you."
- Are most likely to be swayed by needs-based messages. Of the three age groups, they responded most positively to the idea that "you hear that an organization cannot meet a growing demand for the services it provides" (67 percent said they would be more likely to donate) and "you hear that an organization is stepping up to replace cuts in government-provided services" (also 67 percent).





# Generational Differences: Connections

### Coloradans age 65 and up:

- Are the most loyal to the organizations they support. They're most likely to report making a gift to an organization they've supported in the past, with 83 percent saying they'd made a gift to the same organization within the past two years, and 82 percent reporting a past gift more than two years ago.
- Value specific information. Sixty-one percent say it's very important for a nonprofit to "provide you with a clear understanding of how your money will be used."
- Are much more likely to give in response to an appeal from the organization. Seventy-two percent say they received an appeal before making their most recent donation.
- Respond to requests via mail, with 62 percent saying they'd made a donation in response to a mail appeal in the past 12 months.
- Would give more if they were better connected with nonprofits. Forty-six percent say an important reason for not giving more is that "I don't know enough about charities," and 30 percent rank "no one has asked me to give" as an important factor.
- Are less receptive to situation-based messages. We asked how they felt about messages like, "someone in your community had a good experience with the organization," "an organization is poised to undertake a bold new project," or "an organization is in danger of closing due to funding shortages." Of the three age groups, these donors most often said that nearly every message would actually make them *less likely* to donate.

Not surprisingly, we found an overwhelming majority of donors – across all age groups – agree that they choose to support nonprofits which "support causes you believe in." Overall, 93 percent say this is important or very important). Donors of all generations are also united in their desire to support charities they trust (97 percent), those that connect them with a sense that their gift is helping to solve a problem (86 percent), and those with a proven track record of success (83 percent).

Perhaps more surprising is the agreement we found among donors of all age groups when asked about their reasons for not donating more. Across the board, by far the top reason they report is "I can't afford to give more" (73 percent overall), followed by "I give to family and friends who are in need" (65 percent) and "I already support too many" (49 percent). Some generational differences do appear, especially among the lower-ranked responses, but in general, this question found much agreement among donors of different generations.

# Understanding Giving: Across Generations

## Conclusion

Examining donor trends by age group is one of many ways to learn more about the broad spectrum of Colorado donors. In our original report, *Understanding Giving: Beliefs & Behaviors of Colorado Donors*, we discussed the highly personal and emotional nature of giving. By learning more about donors – their individual perspectives, motivations, and lifestyles – we can tailor our messaging and outreach efforts, building a more personal conversation with each supporter.

## About the Colorado Generosity Project

In 2007, the Colorado Nonprofit Association launched the Colorado Generosity Project, an initiative aimed at building expertise within and awareness of the state's charitable sector, with the ultimate goal of increasing Coloradans' generosity. Various data sets have shown that Colorado lags behind other states in terms of giving. When compared to other states, Coloradans have relatively high incomes but do not support nonprofits as strongly. The Generosity Project seeks to increase the rate and total amount of giving to Colorado's nonprofits by:

1. conducting research about giving trends in Colorado;
2. helping nonprofits fundraise more effectively through technical assistance and training; and
3. teaching the public about the value of giving to charitable organizations.

## Acknowledgements



SE2 is a Colorado-based mass communications firm focused on public issues, policy and social marketing. They offer a full range of advertising and public relations services to nonprofits and issue-driven organizations, helping them tell their story and identify key messages that move their audiences to action.



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# Understanding Giving: Across Generations

## About Us



*Serving nonprofits. Strengthening communities.*

*Colorado Nonprofit Association leads, serves and strengthens Colorado nonprofit organizations. We are a statewide nonprofit membership coalition connecting nonprofits of all sizes, missions and geographic locations.*

We **lead** the nonprofit sector in influencing public policy and public opinion.

We **serve** our members by providing tools for communication, networking and administration.

We **strengthen** the nonprofit community through trainings, issue discussions, and public advocacy about the importance of the nonprofit sector.