



Emerging Gen Z

SUMMARY: Generation Z—defined as the generation born from 1997 to 2012—is coming into focus. As their role in the workforce expands, gen Z's approach to work will shape and be shaped by shifting workplace requirements and new technologies, including artificial intelligence. They are the most diverse generation in American history. Due to their demographics and concerns, gen Z will bring new attitudes toward education, work, family, and life priorities.



Forecasts

- Gen Z will be more liberal than other generations, but not overwhelmingly so. Their politics will fall partly along racial lines, with white Gen Zers—especially men—leaning more conservative than their peers.
- As digital natives, many in Gen Z will be highly adapted to online collaboration and will prefer remote and hybrid work options when possible. Their relative lack of exposure to in-person work may shift traditional office politics and hierarchy.
- Gen Z relationships and family formation may be impeded by the ideological divergence between men and women in the generation, changes in traditional expectations for gender roles, high housing costs and education debt, and hesitancy to have children in a world facing climate change.
- As the first social media-native generation, Gen Z's immersion in short-form content and influencer culture will deeply shape their informational and social habits, as well their views on privacy.
- Gen Z will have flexible and accepting views of diversity in gender and sexuality, with many viewing fluidity as the norm.
- Gen Z will be ready to take strong action against climate change; their level of concern is substantially higher than older generations, even among conservative Gen Zers.

Key Uncertainties

Economic and political conditions of Gen Z's early adulthood

•
How Gen Z's political views evolve over time

•
Approach to traditional life milestones

•
Long-term effects of pandemic learning loss and social isolation

•
Effects of immigration on their numbers

•
Impact of personalized media and AI on learning and critical thinking skills

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Supporting Trends

- **Gen Z entering adulthood.** About four million members of the 70 million Gen Zers become adults each year, a pace that will continue into the 2030s. Annual cohorts are about the same size as those of millennials.
- **Cautiously hopeful.** Gen Z shows signs of cautious optimism. In 2021 polling of teens born 2003-2007, 90 percent felt they would make a good living, and 51 percent felt they had a good chance to become rich. Nonwhite teens were more optimistic than white teens about personal and general societal futures.
- **Growth of gender fluidity.** Gender fluidity could become a hallmark of younger millennials and Generation Z, as an increasing number decline to identify with any specific gender.
- **“Practical” college degrees.** American undergraduates are shifting their degrees away from liberal arts and social sciences and toward science, technology, and health degrees.
- **Gen Z and careers.** High school-age Gen Zers believe in postsecondary education and see it as necessary for success, with 84 percent planning on it, though many of them are skeptical of a four-year college degree.
- **Preference for visual content.** Gen Z gravitates toward short form, often peer-to-peer visual media sites such as YouTube and TikTok, with most teens visiting both sites daily, and nearly one-fifth using the sites incessantly.

Related Drivers of Change

- Immigration-Driven Demography
- American Wealth Gaps
- Shrinking Youth Populations
- The Next-Gen Professionals

Notable Data Points

HIGHLY DIVERSE

52% of Gen Z in the U.S. is white,
25% is Hispanic, 14% is Black,
6% is Asian-American,
and 5% identify as mixed-race.

Source: Kim Parker and Ruth Igielnik, "On the Cusp of Adulthood and Facing an Uncertain Future: What We Know About Gen Z So Far," Pew Research Center, May 14, 2020.

FINANCIAL INSECURITY

In a 2023 study,
52% of Gen Z respondents
said they were very or extremely worried
about money.

Source: How can understanding the influence of Gen Z today empower your tomorrow?: 2023 EY Gen Z Segmentation Study, EY, 2023.

TOP CONCERNS

In a 2022 survey,
Gen Z identified cost of living (29%),
climate change (24%), unemployment (20%),
Gen Z mental health (19%), and
sexual harassment (17%)
as their top concerns.

Source: Striving for Balance, Advocating for Change: The Deloitte Global 2022 Gen Z & Millennial Survey.

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Strategic Insights

- The diversity of Gen Z and social polarization in the United States mean that any effort to understand the generation must separate demographic factors from genuine generational tendencies.
- The highly educated professionals in the generation have entered the workforce and will be desirable new members of many kinds of associations, so now is the time for associations to assess their offerings and processes to ensure they meet the needs and preferences of Gen Z workers.
- The speed of social and technological change means that Gen Z could be ideal participants in two-way mentoring programs with older colleagues.
- Associations should assess how Gen Z learning and media expectations correlate to their education, conference/meetings offerings, and how these offerings should change for digital natives educated with contemporary learning models.
- Generation Z has grown up with freewheeling attitudes toward digital sharing. Gen Z workers may need guidance on social media professionalism, data privacy, and intellectual property. The latter may be increasingly important as advanced artificial intelligence tools permeate workplaces.
- Employers will need to understand the salience of mental health for Gen Z, as they view it as central to work-life quality and report widespread mental health concerns. Ensuring an organizational culture of mental wellness is increasingly important for associations who want to attract Gen Z members.
- Some Gen Zers may find face-to-face social interactions challenging. Associations can support these members by offering additional training in professional networking and business relationship development. These kinds of offerings could appeal to a wider audience across generations.

Timing

- **Stage:** Emerging, as half of the generation are still children.
- **Speed:** Medium, with millions entering adulthood each year.

Potential Alternative Futures

- **Zooming.** Gen Z's deep experience with remote life and AI catapult them toward workplace success as they prove to be uniquely adapted to the moment.
- **Polarized youth.** The experiences, media habits, and demography of Gen Z cause them to internalize and amplify societal polarization.
- **Fervent pragmatists.** Gen Z reacts to polarization and political dysfunction by turning toward practical politics.
- **Digitally disconnected.** Social and economic malaise push Gen Z to withdraw into games, viral content, and screens.

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Take Action

- **Ask your Gen Z constituents about their needs and expectations and commit to acting on their input.** Include student communities with which your association engages and dig into existing research on Gen Z to broaden your perspective on cohorts outside of your bubble. Be open to adapting your programs and services as well as delivery mechanisms. Recognize that the diversity of this generation will require diverse approaches.
- **Create an intentional engagement strategy to build a relationship with Gen Z.** Communicate via channels they frequent and employ infographics, video, and other short-form styles. Create pathways into mentorships and professional networks. Emphasize your role in building community and connecting people. Authenticity comes from consistency in messaging and actions.
- **With multiple generations in the workforce, consider generational characteristics in the context of life or career stage.** Facilitate conversations across staff about autonomy, work quality, and accountability to each other. Create a safe space for potentially difficult conversations about organizational culture and shifting work norms. Identify the right level of flexibility that works for your organization and creates a welcoming environment for all generations.
- **Revamp your traditional leadership pipeline to eliminate the 20-year ladder.** Find ways to engage Gen Z earlier while recognizing that people going through the traditional pipeline may feel skipped over. Have proactive conversations about new governance models that include all generations.
- **Take a broad view of educational needs for Gen Zers.** Recognize that some will enter the workforce outside of academic pathways but with more practical experience, while others may have had career-specific academic training but no experience in the workforce or developing nontechnical knowledge. Take a holistic approach to continuing education to include soft skills—like critical thinking and relationship building—as well as technical skills. Regularly review and update the credentials that your profession or industry requires.

Who Will Be Affected

Generation Z's entry into the workforce is accelerating, with growing impacts for all associations and industry groups.

About ASAE ForesightWorks

ASAE ForesightWorks is a deliberate, evidence-based research program and line of products to provide association professionals with a continual stream of intelligence about the changes facing the association industry, including:

- Regularly updated action briefs;
- Tools for applying insights from the research in your association;
- Guidance in performing environmental scans;
- Opportunities to engage with peers around the research.

Ultimately, the program's mission is to empower association leaders to create a culture of foresight in their associations and to lead their organizations confidently into the future.

Check the asaecenter.org/foresightworks webpage and follow ASAE Research Foundation on [LinkedIn](#) for updates on new findings and events.

Keyword Search

To continue researching this change driver, use these search terms alone or in combination: *gen Z, generation Z, zoomers, teens, next gen, polling, technology, social media, education, work, workforce, mental health, mental wellness, mobile first, viral content, influencer.*