



# The Next-Gen Professionals

**SUMMARY:** Millennials are now the largest generational cohort in the workforce, and generation Z is right behind them. These next-gen professionals are the future of associations and, contrary to some conventional wisdom, they are willing to both join and stay with organizations that meet their career development needs. Organizations will need to provide the kinds of training, mentoring, content, and other services that next-gen professionals value most, encouraging engagement that leads to loyalty.

## Forecasts

- Millennials will join organizations in larger numbers as three trends unfold: their share of the U.S. workforce continues to increase, their financial status improves, and more organizations reshape their offerings around what many millennials value most. These highly-valued offerings include mentoring and training; personalization; state-of-the-art tech platforms; curated content; real job leads; plenty of networking with other millennials and with leaders in their field; and, often, a sense of meaning.
- Next-gen professionals will motivate more organizations to step up their training and education—and in formats younger generations prefer: just-in-time microlearning, multiscreen events, co-mentoring, and smaller, more focused face-to-face meetings.
- Many next-gen professionals will continue to push for merit-based leadership positions, seeking to bypass the traditional promotion ladder.
- Next-gen professionals could form their own organizations if they are unable to get what they want from baby boomer- and gen X-led organizations.

## Key Uncertainties

*How the youngest millennials will differ from their generation's elders*

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*Whether certain key characteristics (slowness in purchasing cars and homes, starting families late, etc.) are lifestyle-based or are lifelong traits of this generational cohort*

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*Whether a more robust labor market and rising wages will continue—and whether this will change next-gen professionals' consumer and lifestyle behaviors*



## Supporting Trends

- **Next-gens as joiners.** Next-gen professionals will join professional organizations, but need the right incentives.
- **Millennials not job-hoppers.** Close to half of U.S. millennials who have leadership positions in their companies say they want to stay in their jobs long term.
- **Training millennials.** Millennials tend to value training above other benefits.
- **Virtual volunteering.** More volunteering is happening online.
- **The ethical economy.** Younger Americans overwhelmingly say that their decision making is driven by their personal values.
- **Changing performance evaluation.** The annual performance review is disappearing, as millennials and gen Zs want more timely feedback and communication from their employers.
- **Millennials largest share of U.S. workforce.** Millennials are now the largest generation in the U.S. labor force—and gen Z is poised to pass them in size.
- **Boomers and millennials—fighting over jobs?** Analysis suggests that millennials' career prospects will not likely be harmed by baby boomers delaying retirement.

## Notable Data Points

### JOINING IN DROVES

**58% of under-40s said they belong to a professional organization or community**

while 77% of the rest said they intend to join one soon.

Source: Buzz Marketing Group, Professional Organizations Study 2015

### LONG-TERM LEADERS

In a 2017 poll, about **44% of millennials** with leadership positions said they could **see themselves working for their companies for more than 15 years.**

Source: The Conference Board, Divergent Views/Common Ground: The Leadership Perspectives of C-Suite Executives and Millennial Leaders

### TRAINING IS #1

According to Deloitte, **training and development is millennials' top preferred benefit,** with 22% of those surveyed ranking it as such.

Source: Deloitte

## Related Drivers of Change

- Socializing Reshaped
- Microlearning
- Virtualized Meetings
- Mentoring 2.0
- Transparent Organizational Ethics



## Strategic Insights

- Be wary of half-truths about millennials, which all too often are circulated by marketing firms based on sketchy research or outdated assumptions. Consider convening a focus group, formal or informal, of millennial members—and former members, if available—to inquire deeply into exactly what they want from the association. Be ready to dive deeper with specific questions, e.g., which training or event formats they would prefer.
- Mentoring can be a valuable service that associations provide to next-gen professionals, along with bespoke training and education, smaller and more focused meetings, and tangible career opportunities.
- Many millennials have delayed important life milestones, such as home buying and family formation, due to economic concerns. What are the effects of these delays on their career trajectories? How does this shape what they need from associations?
- What values does the association stand for, and do they align with values next-gen professionals might hold as important? Are the association's values sufficiently prominent in its online profile and messaging?
- In line with the national trend toward political polarization, some millennials might begin politicizing their organizational participation. The potential exists for millennials to drive values-based divisions within their professional groups.
- Associations can study successful groups, such as YEC and FounderSociety—two invitation-only membership communities for entrepreneurs under 40 that have young staffs, a concierge approach, vibrant social-media spaces, and tightly curated content.

### Timing

- **Stage:** Growth, with the impacts expanding and deepening as more next-gen professionals move into the workforce and as they mature in their aspirations
- **Speed:** Medium to rapid, driven by organizations' quest to attract and retain next-gen professionals

### Potential Alternative Futures

- **Sticking with my clan:** Many millennials and gen Zs abandon existing associations and convene with other next-gen professionals to form their own associations, tailored to their preferences.
- **Financial fetters:** Most next-gen professionals never fully break free of the constraints of student debt, slow career starts, expensive healthcare, and a fitful economy, with many adjusting their aspirations downward.



## Take Action

- **Ask younger members what they need.** Don't let presumed generational differences drive your strategies and programming decisions. Ask next-gen professionals what they need. You might discover millennials and gen Zs share many of the same priorities and preferences that other member cohorts have.
- **Provide career guidance.** Millennials are building their careers in uncertain times with fewer traditional job opportunities, and there may be more uncertainty ahead for generation Z. Illustrate and promote diverse career paths. Provide opportunities to experience other businesses and organizations through internships, fellowships, and job exchanges. Establish corporate executive tracking for high potentials. Offer mentors to provide wisdom and reassurance in critical life decisions.
- **Restructure volunteer opportunities and accelerate the path to top leadership positions.** With their commitment to work-life balance, millennials want to serve in more flexible and ad hoc volunteer assignments. They are often proficient with collaboration technologies. Fast-track rising stars with the skills and leadership potential your association needs. Don't let protracted pathways to top leadership dampen their enthusiasm and loyalty.
- **Refresh your education and training with new approaches and technologies.** Next-gen professionals are interested in dynamic, hands-on experiences as well as microlearning and online learning channels that align with their need to balance work and life. Market your association's ability to meet their interest in education and training.
- **Promote diversity and inclusion.** Millennials and generation Z are the most diverse generational cohorts in the United States to date. They are quick to notice when organizations don't share their acceptance of diversity or their desire to see everyone respected and included.
- **Update your networking events.** Offer social and networking experiences that appeal to multiple generations and enable attendees to connect across generational lines.

## Keyword Search

To continue researching this change driver, use these search terms:

*generations, generation X, millennial preferences, baby boomers, mentoring, co-mentoring, microlearning, professional organizations, FounderSociety, YEC, generation Z*

### Who Will Be Affected

All organizations are affected, as millennials are now the largest cohort in the U.S. workforce. Professions and businesses facing workforce shortages due to increasing demand for services or extensive boomer retirements place a high priority on attracting and retaining millennials in their workforce and the association.

### About ASAE ForesightWorks

ASAE ForesightWorks is a deliberate, evidence-based research program and emerging 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; and
- opportunities to engage with peers around the research.

Ultimately, the program's mission is to empower association leaders to create a culture of foresight.

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