Building Bridges for Climate Action

Engagement Strategies for Millennials

A report by Tara Mahoney, Ph.D., David Suzuki Fellow
What are the best strategies and practices for getting millennials engaged in climate change issues?
METHODOLOGY

- LITERATURE REVIEW
- INTERVIEWS
- EXPERIMENTS
- WORKSHOPS
"Overall currents in demographics and cultural preferences, which are already shaping the future for non-profits, clearly point to the need for greater investment and attention towards engagement strategies that deepen ties with new cohorts."

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WHY MILLENNIALS MATTER

- SIZE
- POLITICAL POWER
- ECONOMIC POWER
KEY TRAITS

- Educated and diverse
- Face serious economic struggles
- Avid social media users and highly influenced by their peers
- Are creative and want to co-create
- Highly value experiences
- Centre-left political values
KEY TRAITS (CON'T)

- Low participation (relative to Baby Boomer generation) in elections, political parties and policy processes at all levels of government.

- Don’t trust politicians but do trust government intervention.

- More like to identify with causes or social movements.

- See themselves as ‘everyday changemakers’ rather than ‘activists’.
MILLENNIAL SOCIAL VALUES STUDY (2017)

Engaged Idealists (17% of Canadian Millennials) are among the most socially connected and upbeat, already embarked on a meaningful career path and keen to make a contribution to society. They share much in common with a much smaller group, Critical Counterculturists (4%), who take a more questioning stance on the status quo, status and authority.

Diverse Strivers (20%) and New Traditionalists (11%) are more ethnically-mixed groups, the former are among the most focused on career success but also active in their communities, while the latter are the oldest and most established of the groups, and for whom traditional values and religion are important guideposts.

In sharp contrast, Lone Wolves (16%) (about one in six Canadian Millennials) are the group making the least progress in establishing themselves, and playing an active role, in society. Compared with other Millennials, Lone Wolves are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed, have little or no post-secondary education, lack clear lifetime goals and confidence in future success, and are the least engaged in their communities.

Finally, Bros & Brittany’s (32%) make up the largest segment of this generation (one in three), and as such tend to define the average in terms of their life experiences, aspirations and priorities. Financial stability is an important life goal and most are employed, but they also put a premium on having a good time and getting along rather than changing the world.
'Everyday change-making’

is the most prevalent form of public participation practiced by Millennials. It combines issue-orientated rallies, crowdfunding and petitions with day-to-day activities, like changing eating habits, reducing waste and changing transportation methods.
MILLENNIALS AND CLIMATE CHANGE
92% of millennials say that climate change is a serious problem.

87% agree Canada needs to transition quickly away from fossil fuels to renewable energy.

71% say the government is not doing enough to address climate change.
64% of those between 18 and 44 agree with the statement:

“The climate emergency requires that our governments adopt a wartime-scale response, making major investments to retool our economy, and mobilizing everyone in society to transition off fossil fuels to renewable energy.”

- Abacus Data (2019)
How Millennials Engage in Climate Change

**LOCAL DIY PROJECTS**
- art projects, awareness-raising events, educational programs, and local sustainability initiatives

**LIFESTYLE POLITICS**
- recycling, bicycling, consuming “green” products and following vegetarian or vegan diets.

**NETWORKED SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**
- participating via ENGOs or grassroots movements (e.g: Extinction Rebellion and the Student Climate Strikes)

**FOUNDING OR WORKING AT ORGS**
- advocacy organizations, foundations, businesses, social entreprises
While Millennials are increasingly engaged and concerned about climate change, many are still disengaged and alienated from the institutions and processes that are integral to meaningful action on climate change.
Millennial Disengagement

73% of millennials in the United States say that global warming is "personally important" to them, but only 37% said they were willing to contact government officials about the issue. Just 13% said they actually had contacted government officials about the issue in the last year.

- Yale Program on Climate Change Communication (2019)
Why doesn’t the concern Millennials have for climate change translate into greater engagement with political institutions?

What are the best strategies and practices for getting millennials engaged in climate change issues?
MEGATRENDS SHAPING MILLENNIAL ENGAGEMENT

- NEOLIBERALISM
- DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT / CIVIC LITERACY DEFICIT
- ECONOMIC CONTEXT
- PARTICIPATORY CULTURE
KEY FINDINGS

1. The millennial generation is large, diverse and educated.

2. Millennial engagement with climate change issues is complex and contradictory.

3. Neoliberalism creates a challenge and an opportunity for millennial climate change engagement.

4. Millennials lack faith in and knowledge about collective climate action via democratic institutions.
Although millennials care about climate change, there are many socio-economic stressors competing for their attention.

Participation” is a cultural norm and form of collective meaning-making.

Change is coming.

An effective millennial strategy acts as a bridge.
RECOMMENDATIONS

OPENESS  SALIENCE  CAPACITY
OPENESS (THEME)

1. Be open to the transformation that Millennials will bring and nurture Millennial leadership.

2. Be more human and more transparent.

3. Embrace co-creation and share power.
SALIENCE (THEME)

4. Prioritize an intersectional lens on climate change issues and merge climate change with the social equity issues Millennials are concerned about.

5. Emphasize the ‘gain’ frame while leveraging feelings of loss aversion.

6. Target key segments or ‘tribes’ of Millennials through 'relational organizing'.
Engage artists/creatives and utilize popular culture.

Teach civic/political literacy related to climate issues.

Use Instagram to connect lifestyle politics to climate policy.

Facilitate “cool experiences” that build community.
THANK YOU!

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