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Dialogue for the discerning donor.

The Millennials, Facebook and Social Change

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Last year at an [Independent Sector](#) conference, a perfectly lovely, fifty-something, development officer type asked [Trabian Shorters](#) (then of [Ashoka](#), now of the [Knight Foundation](#)) a follow up question to his brief comments about younger people and how they use social media for social change.

She said, "If what you say is true that young people want to be connected, why can't we get them to connect with us?"

Trabian responded, "I didn't say they want to be connected, I said they are connected." A deafening silence engulfed the room, which contained no one under the age of thirty, as each and every one of us realized that we, philanthropy's establishment, are solidly on the outside of a young person's social media/social change network, with no way in.

The [Case Foundation](#) has taken a step that will help us all by commissioning a new report from [Allison Fine](#), author of *[Momentum: Igniting Social Change in the Connected Age](#)* called *[Social Citizens](#)*. The report "addresses the unique characteristics of Millennials, a new generation who came of age at the run of this century...in a digital era, and are equipped with innovative tools and ideas for bringing about change."

According to an introductory letter from [Jean Case](#), CEO of the Case Foundation, this research represents one step toward launching a "larger conversation with these social citizens [Millennials], and give them a place to share new ideas and challenge perceptions about their approaches to being engaged."

This careful language that attempts to engage but in no way direct the conversation belies the complexity of the challenge. Many other foundations that are pursuing civic engagement programs will need to walk this careful line, and yet no one is really sure what will work -- what will meaningfully bridge the younger generation's social change efforts to the industry as a whole. (It is possible that this is altogether the wrong question, but a lot of foundation money will be invested/spent before we know for sure.)

[One Economy](#) is in on the experiment with the re-launch this month of its civic engagement site, [247Townhall.org](#). According to its enewsletter, "247Townhall connects young people across the nation who have a wealth of opinions and ideas to share. One Economy Corporation created 247Townhall with generous support from the [Marguerite Casey Foundation](#), to provide a free tool for expression and action. This site brings together everyday people who want to do good things for their community, forging a network for change."

It is worth it to check in again on [Think MTV](#), the numbers of views of which have moved from hundreds to tens of thousands in a few issue areas. With the [backing](#) of the likes of Viacom, The Gates Foundation, The Case Foundation and others, this is an experiment in youth civic engagement/social change to watch closely.

Whether the social change efforts of young people connect with the overall sector, or operate on a parallel track, many of us sense that there is much to be gained from better understanding of its dynamics, if not tapping into its potential power. We will be watching these experiments for what they tell us about the future of philanthropy.