

Generational Diversity in Lorain County Ohio

Diversity is most often viewed in terms of race or gender. Is there a mix of races in a particular community or neighborhood? Are women well represented among the leadership of a community or a company? Given the differences in values and characteristics across generations, it may be useful to understand diversity from a generational perspective. The generation groomed during the Depression Era bears little resemblance to those “millennials” who came of age in more affluent times. Data from several sources (referenced below) are used to create a profile of generational diversity for Lorain County Ohio, beginning with the “Missionary” generation born from 1860 to 1882 through the “Homeland” generation born since 2005. Implications of generational diversity for community-based philanthropy are discussed as well.

Relevant Context and Background

Each generation is shaped by events or circumstances that take place during its lifespan. Members of the generation take on different social roles as they move through their life-stages – youth, young adulthood, midlife, elderhood. According to Neil Howe and William Strauss, “generations follow observable historical patterns and thus offer a very powerful tool for predicting future trends.” That future will be shaped by three generations: Boom, Gen X, and Millennial as other generations enter the last stages of their life and pass on. Researchers Howe and Strauss provide great insights into these generations. Quoting from their article in the *Harvard Business Review*:

Boom:

- They will become wise elders guiding another crisis.
- They will focus on shaping the outlook of Millennial generation.
- They will remain dominant consumers of culture – theater, art galleries, and etc.
- They will be active consumers of “cultural tourism”.
- They will demand a variety of products, services and living environments.
- They will avoid large scale pre-planned communities and keep their families around them unlike the generations before them.
- They will not fully retire. They will become consultants and independent contractors to sustain a self-sufficient lifestyle.
- They will be closer to their children in their physical location, financial health and attitudes.
- They will urge young people to serve community ahead of self.
- They will lose their political power in the future and not stay as political as they once were.

Gen X:

- They will be associated with toughness, grittiness and practicality.
- They will be risk averse as they get older. In their later life stage, they will seek more security in their families and jobs. They will look to become a steady anchor in their communities.
- They will evaluate products by their efficiency, convenience and mass customization.
- They will want to be free agents.
- Their place in politics will be uncertain.
- They will keep their social environment strong.
- They will be extremely protective of their offspring. They will provide financial help to their children as they move through their school years.
- Their attitude towards large institutions will soften as they age.

Millennial:

- They will be deeply engaged in civic life.
- They will fill the role being vacated by senior citizen GIs.
- Online social networks will remain important to this generation.
- They will have to deal with ever growing student loans, increased housing prices and entry-level pay.
- Parents of some will be able to provide financial help while some will not receive any financial help.
- They will be less concerned with gender, race and ethnicity and more with issues of economic class and privileges.
- They will acquire new skills faster than earlier generations.
- They will be viewed as pampered, risk averse, and dependent.
- They will excel when given clear goals and allowed to work in groups.
- They will value cooperation and organization rather than out of the box initiatives.
- They will be more loyal to their employer than earlier generations.
- They will have virtual communities and strong social networks. How will this affect the way that they define a community?
- They will prefer collective action; they will be less individualistic.

Why should these unique generational characteristics matter to a community foundation?

Understanding what defines and drives each of these influential generations will provide a community foundation with the necessary insights to shape their short- and long-term strategic planning, donor and prospect development, and finally, staff, board and volunteer recruitment and development.

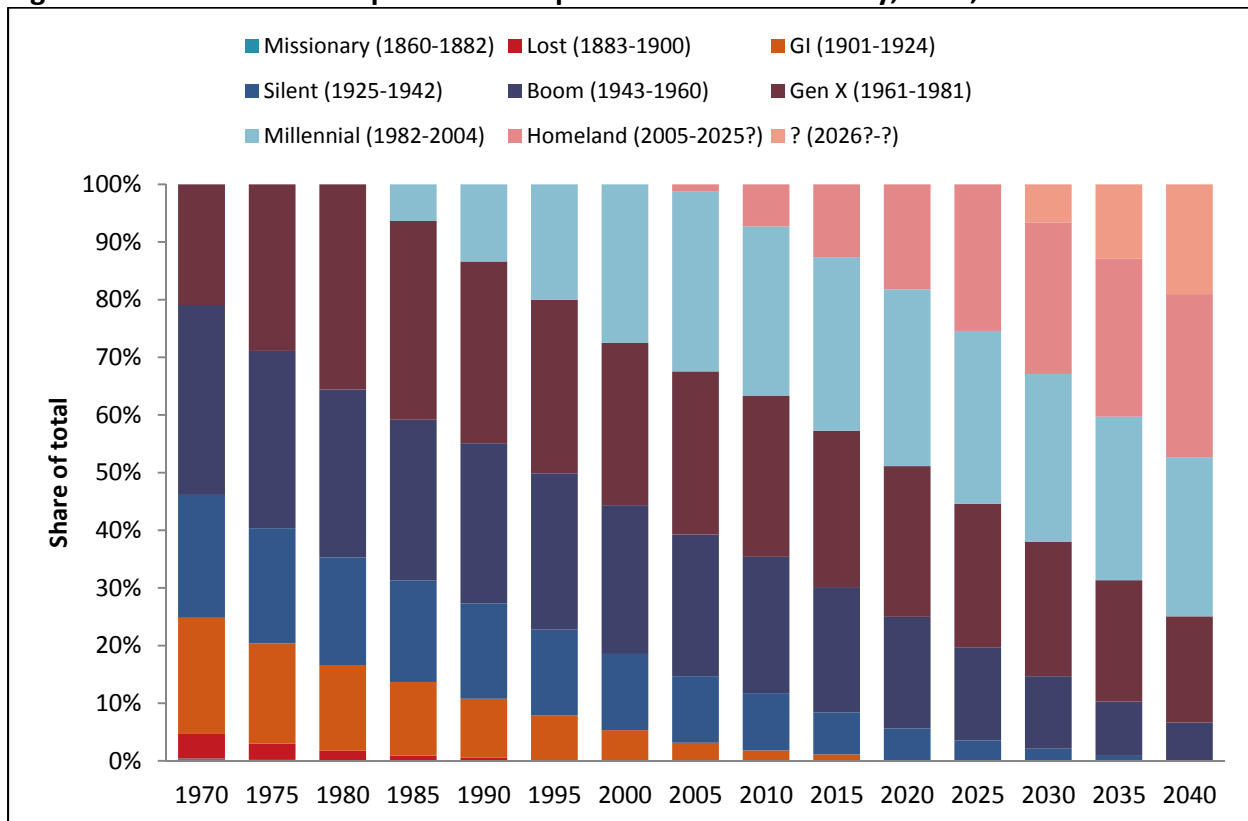
Lorain County's Generational Diversity

Since the 1970s, Lorain County Ohio's population has been increasing. At the same time, the county's population diversity, from a generational perspective, has been changing (Figure 1). Between 1970 and

2010, two generations – Missionary (born 1860-1882) and Lost (born 1883-1900) – disappeared from the population make-up of the county, while two generations – Millennial (born 1982-2004) and Homeland (born 2005-?) – entered the population. This trend will continue as we move forward in time, with older generations exiting and newer generations arriving.

According to a recent national survey by the Center for Effective Philanthropy, the majority of community foundations' donors (over 70%) are from the Silent (born 1925-1942) and Boom (born 1943-1960) generations, while 30% of donors are from Gen X (born 1961-1981). If we assume that Community Foundation of Lorain County's donors follow a pattern similar to the national one, in 2015, 70% of the foundation's donors are coming from just 30% of the county population. In 20 years (2035), these donor generations will make up an even smaller proportion of the county's population, just 10%. In contrast, Gen X and Millennial generations will make up almost 50% of the population in 2035. If the community foundation wants to expand the pool of potential donors from which it can draw in the future, it should focus on understanding the unique features and interests of these younger generations. In other words, if the community foundation wants to understand what may drive a 60-year old donor in 2035, it should understand today's 40-year olds.

Figure 1. Generational Composition of Population in Lorain County, Ohio, 1970-2040



Source: Historical Census (1970-2005) compiled by Woods & Poole; Census 2010, Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau; Population Projections (2015-2040) Ohio Research Office a State Affiliate of the U.S. Census Bureau

The insights from Howe and Strauss, shared by above, provide one starting point. These generational characteristics suggest ways to reach these younger, potentially influential generations – using social media for Millennials, for example. They also point to traits associated with giving – civic mindedness among Millennials; interest in keeping the social environment strong among Gen X; concern about service to community among the Boom generation. If generations do follow observable patterns, understanding the county’s generational diversity, and how it will change over time, could be a powerful tool for the Community Foundation of Lorain County to use in expanding the pool of potential donors.

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Questions & More Information

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