

The Chronicle of
Philanthropy



KEY TAKEAWAYS

What to Know in 2026: Trends and Insights to Guide You

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Nonprofits must navigate many changes this year — from new tax laws to an uncertain financial environment. Meanwhile, the unexpected cancellation of many federal grants last year, and grant makers’ shifting priorities, have exacerbated financial challenges.

To help leaders prepare for the year ahead amid so much turbulence, the *Chronicle* held an online forum entitled “Trends to Watch in 2026,” hosted by executive editor Jim Rendon and featuring Rasheeda Childress, senior editor for fundraising; Alex Daniels, senior editor for foundations; and Ben Gose, senior editor. Here are the key insights from their discussion.

Tax law changes will make donor relationships even more important.

The tax law passed in July 2025 includes significant changes for everyday donors, major donors, and corporate donors. The new policies are a mixed bag for nonprofits, says Childress.

First, the good stuff: Beginning in the 2026 tax year, tax filers who take the standard deduction will be able to claim a charitable deduction of up to \$2,000 if they're married and filing jointly and up to \$1,000 if they're filing as a single person.

Most tax filers — about [90 percent](#) — take the standard deduction. “They now have an opportunity to deduct their charitable giving, which they have not had, generally, in the past,” Childress says.

The new incentive for everyday donors could bolster charitable giving by [\\$20 billion](#) a year, according to one analysis. Fundraisers will play a key role in spreading the word about the new tax benefit available for small-dollar donors, especially as the 2026 tax deadline approaches next year.

This boon, however, is offset by two new challenges that could hamper giving. Donors who itemize their taxes — including most major donors — have a diminished tax incentive to give. Going forward, their charitable contributions must clear a floor of 0.5 percent of their adjusted gross income before they are eligible for a tax deduction.

“The question becomes: Do they not give, or do they increase their giving?” Childress says. Some donors, she notes, may respond by giving more in a single year to clear the floor and then give nothing at all in the following year — a practice called “bunching.”

Some wealthy donors also may choose to contribute to donor-advised funds, rather than giving directly to a charity, to claim an immediate tax benefit. Don't let these donors fall off your radar, Childress says. “The key is really to stay in touch with them, to steward them well,” Childress says, so that when they give from their DAF, they give to your charity.

Community development finance institutions are becoming critical resources for small nonprofits.

Lastly, corporations will only be eligible to receive tax benefits for their charitable gifts if they contribute 1 percent or more of their earnings. Currently, however, most corporations give only around 1 percent of their profits, Childress says. The new floor in corporate giving could curtail these donations by some [\\$4.5 billion](#) each year, according to an estimate by Ernst & Young.

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More foundations may help cover funding shortfalls.

Last year, some nonprofits turned to [bridge loans](#) to plug unexpected holes in their budgets — and Gose’s reporting indicates that trend will continue this year.

The community development finance institutions that offer these loans — such as the Nonprofit Finance Fund and Open Road Impact — are becoming critical resources for small nonprofits that don’t have the collateral to satisfy a bank and can no longer count on consistent federal grant funding.

But these short-term loans typically come with high interest rates, often around 10 percent. These interest rates can be lower, however, when foundations subsidize them.

When the Trump administration dismantled USAID last year, for example, Open Road raised \$13 million from foundations to make emergency no-interest loans to nonprofits that were waiting on grants from the now-defunct agency.

“The trick really is to have foundations and private donors do more in this area,” Gose says. A grant maker, for example, could earmark some portion of its endowment to provide emergency funding for nonprofits. As Gose points out, they are making a financial return on almost all the money in their endowment. More foundations could consider forgoing a portion of the return on their investments to help struggling nonprofits in this way.

Scenario planning will trump strategic plans.

Upheaval in federal grant making, policy changes from executive actions, and donors' hesitancy to open their wallets while the cost of living stays high have all distracted nonprofit leaders during the past year. In 2026, more nonprofits will be focusing on [scenario planning](#) — instead of making multiyear strategic plans.

“The challenges in the sector are such that long-term planning has become something of a luxury,” Gose says.

The [Eisenhower Matrix](#) can be a useful decision-making tool, Gose shared. It's a way to sort options into categories, factoring in considerations such how they help with survival and whether they're aligned with the organization's mission.

“You use that matrix to try to think about actions you could take maybe in the next 12 months that would both help you survive but are also related to mission,” Gose explains.

Grant makers will continue to pull back on racial-justice funding.

Foundations are reconsidering their previous approaches to grant making as the Trump administration continues to reshape the relationship between the federal government and philanthropy.

“They've really been going through a period of risk-reassessment,” says Alex Daniels. Grant makers have spent the last year shoring up against the risk of lawsuits, changing media-relations strategies, altering public speech, and reconsidering nonprofit partners and funders.

Foundations are reconsidering their previous approaches to grant making.

This new risk-averse environment has made many grant makers [hesitant to fund](#) the kinds of racial-justice nonprofits that many rushed to support after the murder of George Floyd in 2020.

“A lot of nonprofit leaders are finding that they’re being asked to change the way that they speak about their work,” Daniels says.

For example, he says, multiple foundations suggested to the leader of Black Girl Ventures — a nonprofit that supports Black women entrepreneurs — that she change the name of her organization so it no longer had the word “Black” in it.

Although some foundations continue to support racial-justice organizations, many are focused on keeping their heads down as the Trump administration enters its second year.

For more insights, explore our coverage: [5 Key Trends to Watch in 2026](#)

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