



Briefing Report | December 2020

Charitable Wills in the 21st Century



LegacyForesight



Many of the charitable legacies received today were first written into wills 10, 15 or even 20 years ago. However, as we move further into the 21st-century, the will-making landscape will be very different, with significant legal, social, economic and technological changes all making an impact. At the same time, British charities are shaping the changes taking place.

The Charitable Wills in the 21st Century project explored will-making and charitable legacies, both now and into the future, considering the implications for legacy fundraisers and managers. The project was funded by a consortium of 30 leading charities, who have agreed to share these six key lessons with the wider sector.

The meaning of wills changes over time

Wills have a continuum of meanings – their nature and importance changes over time. Early wills are very much holding documents – later wills are statements of intent. This means that decisions made early on may change, particularly if life is evolving. **The ‘battleground’** for decisions is in mid-later life, when wills may be completely re-engineered to reflect new assets and connections. For *all* will-makers, information and guidance is key, especially when decisions become more ‘real’ and complex in later life-stages.

The legal sector is undergoing huge change

Ongoing changes taking place in the structure of the legal sector are likely to accelerate in the wake of the pandemic. These include consolidation into the hands of larger /specialist players, widespread adoption of ‘LawTech’ for behind the scenes processes, the provision of remote services rather than face to face and the entry of non-solicitor firms.

Expect legislative evolution not revolution

Despite temporary relaxations of the rules surrounding making and witnessing wills, the Law Commission is cautious and has other pressing priorities. **The experts we spoke to don’t expect** an overhaul of our 19th century will-making laws, or greater regulation of will-writing. Instead, voluntary codes of conduct and more explicit standards seem likely. Likewise, most consumers are fairly conservative in this area – wishing to honour a document they feel should be taken seriously, made securely and protected from fraud.

Online wills are here to stay

Online will-making is seen as a lucrative market – the prize lies in add-on services, access to digital data and charity partnerships. Over the next 5 years we are likely to see a shakeout, as brands jostle for position in an increasingly crowded sector. Overall, 8% of *current* wills were written online, with a strong bias towards younger people. That said, we believe that Millennials are likely to be the first generation to widely adopt online - 19% of those with wills wrote them online, a similar proportion plan to do so next time around. However, even they may become more conservative as they age.

Charity wills hit the mainstream

According to our survey, 12% of all current wills were made using a charity scheme – and 26% of charity wills were made using a free will service! Taken together, charities are a significant player within the will-making sector, with clout to call the shots on a variety of measures such as access to /ownership of donor data and KPIs, imposing codes of conduct on suppliers and guaranteeing exemplary customer service. Intermediaries like Money Saving Expert, Which? and Citizens Advice are important influencers too.

The payback on free wills is long and uncertain

Free will schemes specially appeal to the young and the less well off; many customers are writing their first will. Given the young age profile of the online schemes, payback may take 30++ years. Maintaining relationships with those supporters over such a long period is tricky; good stewardship – and good data – will be essential. In addition, our past research shows that many donors change their minds over time, as circumstances change and new causes and relationships take priority – staying in the will is by no means guaranteed.

Key survey results at a glance

Our research included a large-scale survey on will-making behaviour and attitudes conducted by online specialists Populus. The table below summarises the key data by generation

	Millennials	Generation X	Baby Boomers	War Babies	All adults
Age now	23-39	40-55	56-74	75+	18+
% with a will	10%	28%	67%	85%	36%
% with a charitable will	3%	7%	14%	14%	8%
Current will made online	19%	16%	5%	4%	8%
Current will made through free or subsidised charity scheme	35%	13%	9%	5%	12%

Source: Populus for Legacy Foresight, May/June 2020

Phase 2 : Charitable wills after the pandemic?

Given the extraordinary circumstances surrounding this year's project, burning new questions have emerged which are as yet unanswerable. How will the will-making industry and legacy donors' needs change in the aftermath of the pandemic? What will this mean for legacy fundraisers, operating in such a tough and uncharted environment? Once the immediate crisis is over, we plan to set up a new phase of research to explore these issues in more detail. We hope that you will join us.

Our research approach

Our research was in four stages. First, trend analysis, reading a huge range of government, academic and commercial sources on the social, economic, legal and technological factors driving will-making.

Next, 18 interviews with a wide range of experts including solicitors, will-writers, IFAs, free will schemes, technology companies and legacy administrators.

Third, a large-scale survey of 2,394 adults – including a nationally representative sample of 2,007 UK adults, and a boost sample of another 387 people who had left a gift to charity or another non profit in their will – making a total of 544 adults who had written a charitable will.

Finally, depth telephone interviews with 33 consumers, homing in on a number of important segments, such as Generation X and Millennials, digital early adopters, online will makers, people using charity free will schemes and high net worth individuals.

With thanks to our consortium:

Action for Children	Blue Cross
British Heart Foundation	British Red Cross Society
Cats Protection	CR-UK
Diabetes UK	GOSH
Greenpeace	Guide Dogs
IFAW	Macmillan Cancer Support
Marie Curie Cancer Care	NSPCC
Orbis	Parkinson's UK
PDSA	Prostate Cancer UK
RNIB	RNLI
Royal British Legion	Save the Children (UK)
Stroke Association	Sue Ryder
Tearfund	UNICEF UK
Versus Arthritis	WaterAid
Woodland Trust	WWF UK