



## StoryCause Update | Q1 2026

### **Generosity is alive and well.**

As we closed out 2025, we saw real momentum across the sector and across our partners. At StoryCause, we welcomed more than 20 new partners this year and launched new services designed to better support donor engagement. More importantly, many of our partners experienced record-breaking year-end results. Q4 performance across the market was strong, reinforcing what we continue to believe: generosity is not disappearing. It is evolving.

We are watching early 2026 closely, particularly as tax-driven “bunching” may have influenced late-year giving. Even so, the indicators ahead are encouraging, and we remain optimistic about the year to come.

One trend is especially clear. **Mid-level and leadership annual giving performs best when it is personal.** Technology, including AI, continues to accelerate our ability to segment audiences and tailor outreach with greater precision. But it has not changed the fundamental truth that people give to people. Programs centered on Donor Experience Officers (DXO's), like the work highlighted in this newsletter with Operation Smile, show that thoughtful portfolio management drives stronger retention and growth. We expect this approach to continue gaining momentum in 2026.

Planned giving is another area demanding increased focus. The Great Wealth Transfer is underway, with an estimated \$120 trillion expected to pass to the next generation over the next 30 years. Approximately \$18 trillion of that is projected to flow to charitable organizations. For context, if that amount were held in an endowment today, its annual payout would exceed total U.S. charitable giving last year, which Giving USA reported at \$592 billion.

The year ahead also brings challenges. Donor trust continues to decline, and political and economic pressures are shaping how and where individuals give. This makes intelligence, relevance, and personalization more critical than ever. We often describe this as “show me you know me”. AI is a tool that when used thoughtfully, can help make this a reality. As my colleague Nathan Chappel of Virtuous says, “AI won’t replace fundraisers. But fundraisers who use AI will replace those who don’t.”

We head into 2026 clear-eyed, energized, and ready to help organizations meet this moment.