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Summary Overview: Gen Z Engagement Patterns and Barriers

Research Base: *Structured interviews with mobilization leaders from 18 organizations • Full report available with detailed narrative, quotes, and discussion questions*

1. The Institutional Trust Gap

Gen Z doesn't trust institutions and can detect inauthenticity immediately. Having grown up saturated with recruitment attempts across every platform, they've developed keen skepticism. They need connection to mobilizers as people, not representatives of institutions. Organizations must demonstrate health through transparent communication about both strengths and struggles—organizational vulnerability builds trust rapidly while hiding dysfunction triggers disengagement.

2. The Clarity Paradox

Gen Z demands crystal-clear processes (How much money? What exact steps? What support systems?) yet handles ambiguity well once committed. They need structured pathways that feel personal rather than institutional. Organizations must provide detailed process information while maintaining relational warmth, discussing member care and organizational health in initial conversations rather than waiting until after significant time investment.

3. Relational Investment Requirements

Effective Gen Z mobilization demands significantly increased relational investment: consistent touchpoints, frequent engagement, genuine interest in the whole person. They summarize their needs as "clarity, consistency, care, and challenge." They want to be developed and challenged, not just recruited. Organizations report Gen Z responds powerfully when older adults invest time in truly caring for them. The communal aspect of training proves crucial—seeing peers exploring the same calling provides massive encouragement.

4. Financial Barriers and Practical Obstacles

Financial obstacles represent the most significant barrier. Many graduate with $30K-$100K in student debt, then hear they need to raise $50K-$70K in support—the gap appears insurmountable. Unlike previous generations who might say "the Lord will provide" and move forward, Gen Z defaults to "there's no way I can get there from here." Organizations must actively help overcome obstacles. Creative solutions: bridge loans, reframing support raising as invitation rather than asking, alternative funding models, engaging Gen Z parents who remain involved in adult children's decisions.

5. Skills-Based Entry Points

Gen Z asks "How can I use my skills cross-culturally?" rather than "What location needs workers?" Organizations presenting opportunities by skill and role engage Gen Z more effectively. They prefer B4T models integrating marketplace skills, require multiple pathways (not single traditional routes), and lack organizational loyalty—they find teams they want to join then determine which organization supports them.

6. Processing Patterns and Decision-Making

Gen Z takes longer to commit but demonstrates loyalty once committed. They count costs thoroughly, process decisions collaboratively with peers and community, and want to understand the "why" behind everything. Organizations should avoid pushing for quick decisions while maintaining consistent engagement—regular touchpoints with someone putting next steps in front of them within community context.