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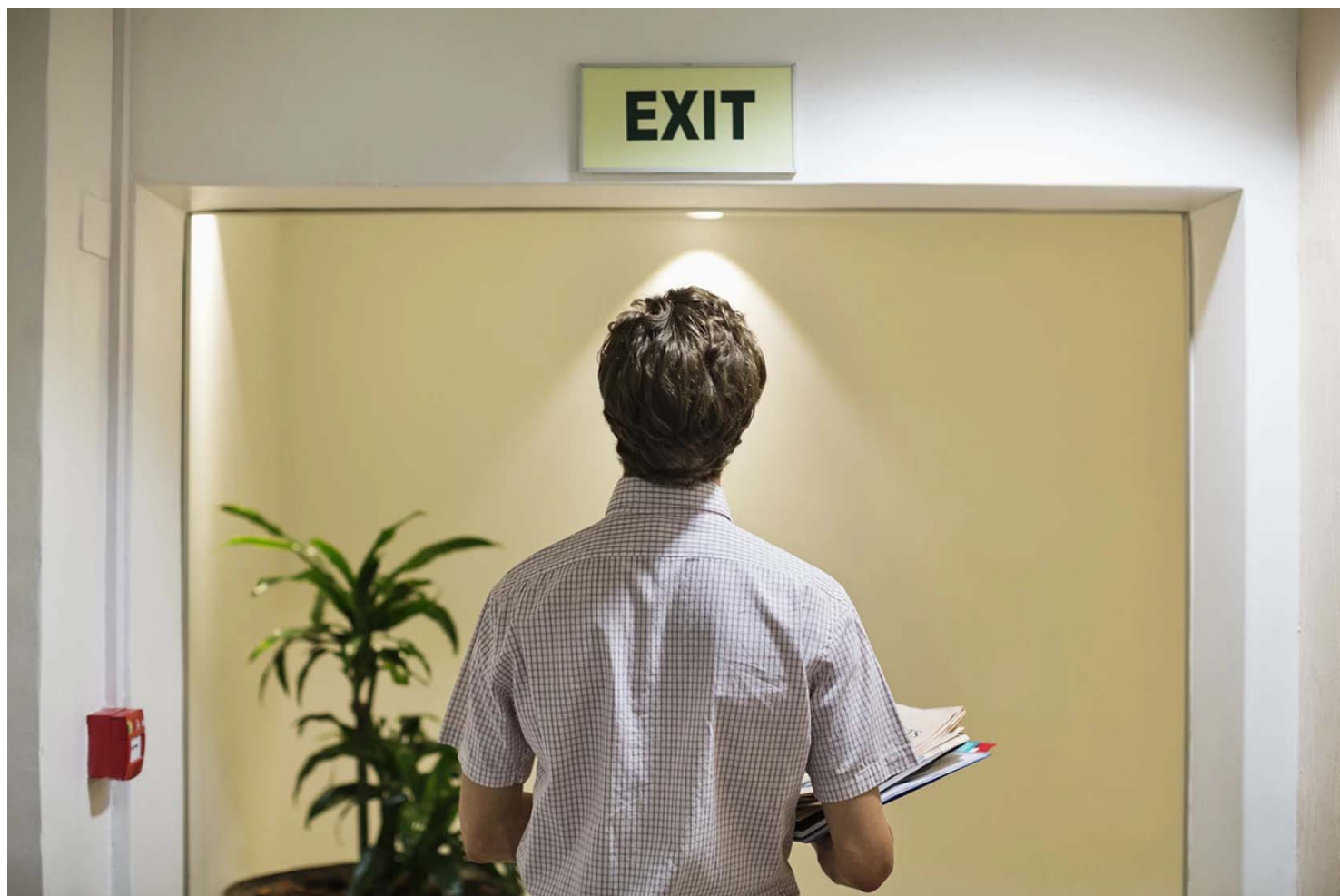
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FUNDRAISING

## 51% of Fundraisers Plan to Leave Their Jobs by 2021, Says New Survey

By *Heather Joslyn*

AUGUST 6, 2019



Too much pressure to meet unrealistic fundraising goals, coupled with too little pay and frustrating organizational cultures, is driving away fundraisers, according to a new *Chronicle of Philanthropy* survey.

· Salary · Student Loans · Cost of Living · Unrealistic Expectations · Pressure to Produce · Bad Data · No Data · Old Technology · Not Enough Staff · Not Enough Resources · Fundraising Jobs Vacant Too Long · Demanding Donors · Pressure to Show Impact · No Succession Plan · Founders Syndrome · No Room to Move Up · No Training · I

## Why Fundraisers Are Fed Up

Think fundraisers leave just to chase bigger salaries? A new survey commissioned by the Chronicle of Philanthropy and the Association of Fundraising Professionals says you're wrong.

### Solutions to Fundraisers' Biggest Challenges

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### Should You Counter a Fundraiser's Job Offer? It Depends, Say Experts

Half of all fundraisers surveyed expect to leave their jobs in the next two years, the report says.

Even more alarming, three in 10 said they had recently left or plan to leave the development field altogether in the next two years.

While the large number of baby boomers in fundraising could account for some of that, it's hardly the main source; only 12 percent said they planned to retire or had family changes or other personal reasons for quitting.

The new figures come from a survey of 1,035 fundraisers in the United States and Canada, conducted by Harris Insights & Analytics, through the Harris Poll, for the *Chronicle* and the Association of Fundraising Professionals. The online questionnaire asked survey participants about their job satisfaction; 5 percent of the survey takers included people who had left fundraising altogether within the past five years.

## Too Much Pressure, Too Little Appreciation

The new data shows that even after a widely shared study in 2013 sent a warning signal to nonprofit leaders about the anxiety and unhappiness of fundraisers, little has improved. Half of the top development officers [in that survey](#), “Underdeveloped,” conducted by CompassPoint and the Evelyn & Walter Haas Jr. Fund, said they were considering leaving their jobs.

The reasons the revolving door keeps spinning are numerous, our survey shows. But two findings stand out:

- 84 percent of fundraisers said they felt “tremendous pressure to succeed” in their role.
- 55 percent said they “often feel unappreciated” in their work.

Seeing an unpromising future at a job can stir a fundraiser’s restlessness, according to the survey results. At the jobs they left most recently, they were likeliest to be dissatisfied with their prospects for promotion (85 percent) or a lack of succession planning (83 percent).

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## Seeking More Time With Donors

The new survey did highlight some bright spots. Among them:

- Fundraisers are driven by mission; 93 percent of survey participants said they couldn't work for a charity if they didn't have a strong connection to the cause.
- They're happy with their travel schedule (92 percent).
- They appreciate their organization's flexibility regarding their family and child-care issues.
- They are satisfied with their level of independence in their jobs (83 percent), and the same share said they're happy with their relationship with their charity's volunteers (excluding board members).

In addition, fundraisers relish working with donors: 78 percent said they wished they had more time to spend meeting with supporters.

The survey provides valuable insights into how fundraisers feel about their work. "It helps us put a number on what we're hearing anecdotally," says Michael Nilsen, vice president for communications and public policy at the Association for Fundraising Professionals.

But those donors are changing, the survey found. Compared with five years ago:

- Supporters want more information on their gifts' impact, according to 92 percent of participants
- They're more aware of social issues (85 percent)
- And donors are more likely to earmark their gifts for specific programs (77 percent)

Respondents also said that fundraising is getting harder: One in three said donations to their charity had dropped in the past two years. The [latest "Giving USA" figures](#)

showed philanthropy over all down 1.7 percent in 2018 compared with the previous year — including a 3.4 percent drop in giving by individuals.

## Help Wanted

In the 2013 study “Underdeveloped,” directors of development complained about a lack of help from their executive directors and boards. The new Harris Poll shows that a significant number of development professionals still struggle to get the help they need from their organization’s leaders: 36 percent of fundraisers said they were dissatisfied with the support they got from their boards, and 29 percent said they were dissatisfied with the help received from the CEO.

Through interviews with the *Chronicle*, many fundraisers and recruiters decried a lack of patience on the part of charity leaders, shared dismay over how fundraisers are isolated in organizations and the fact that other staff don’t understand fundraisers’ jobs — especially how long it takes to establish deep relationships with wealthy donors.

Derric Bakker, a fundraising consultant and recruiter in Asheville, N.C., offered an example: His firm placed a fundraiser at an organization in October, in the middle of year-end giving season. “We met with them in April, and they’re ready to throw in the towel because he’s not raising any money,” Bakker says. “This guy has probably already started sending out his resumé. He’s been set up for failure.”

That situation isn’t unusual, he says. “People don’t understand the complexity of fundraising, so they just start thinking, We need to get someone else. They probably could, but they need to first fix some of the issues in the organization.”

## Leadership Development

As fundraisers, “we often don’t understand how much of our work is going to be a political process of getting people within the organization on our side,” says Denny

Young, a veteran development officer for charities in Toronto who long taught the field's fundamentals at Humber College, until he retired last year.

Fundraising associations, he believes, need to do a better job of preparing their members to educate philanthropy leaders and foot soldiers about what fundraising is and the role they need to play.

That's exactly what the Association of Fundraising Professionals has in store, according to Nilsen. In recent years, the group has increased the number of educational sessions it offers on building a "culture of philanthropy" within charities. And it's planning much more.

Early this summer, it held a meeting that included leaders of some other associations, including BoardSource; some fundraisers; and representatives of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Indiana University's Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. The participants began to sketch out a framework for a leadership-development program for fundraisers. Creating the program, Nilsen says, will probably take at least a year.

The new effort, he says, is a continuation of the [gender-equity work](#) the association started last year, following up on its survey with the *Chronicle* and Harris about [sexual harassment of fundraisers](#).

"As a community of fundraisers, we have a responsibility to look at those issues beyond the basics and the best practices of fundraising," he says. "What does it mean to be a fundraising professional in the workplace?"

The work that fundraisers have to do to gain support from within their organizations is surprising to many, Nilsen acknowledges: "They think, I don't just have to steward my donors. I've got to steward my staff."



A version of this article appeared in the [August 6, 2019, issue](#).

Read other items in this [Why Fundraisers Are Fed Up](#) package.

We welcome your thoughts and questions about this article. Please [email the editors](#) or [submit a letter](#) for publication.

FUNDRAISING FROM INDIVIDUALS

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### Heather Joslyn

Heather Joslyn spent nearly two decades covering fundraising and other nonprofit issues at the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, beginning in 2001.

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