

# THE CHRONICLE OF PHILANTHROPY

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## NEWS

# Sexual Harassment Is Widespread Problem for Fundraisers, Survey Shows

By *Timothy Sandoval*

APRIL 5, 2018

## [#MeToo Hits the Nonprofit World](#)

As the #MeToo movement reverberates through workplaces across America, nonprofit leaders say it is also triggering a reckoning, and creating an opportunity, in charitable fundraising.

## [Sexual Harassment Is Widespread Problem for Fundraisers, Survey Shows](#)

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## [Ending Harassment at Nonprofits Means Changing Office Culture, Experts Say](#)

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## [About the Chronicle/AFP Poll on Sexual Harassment at Nonprofits](#)

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## [Time's Up Fund to Fight Sexual Harassment Raises \\$21 Million From Around the Globe](#)

Donors are a big source of the sexual harassment that fundraisers face on the job, according to polling results released today by the Chronicle of Philanthropy and the Association of Fundraising Professionals.

Two-thirds of people who reported sexual harassment on the job blamed donors, while the rest said misconduct came from colleagues, mostly those in senior positions.

About one in four female fundraisers has experienced sexual harassment in their careers, according to the poll, while only 7 percent of male fundraisers have. Almost all the harassers — 96 percent — are men, according to the study, which was conducted online in February by the Harris Poll. That data is in line with other estimates of the extent of harassment in U.S. workplaces.

## Victims and Offenders

1 in 4 female fundraisers has faced sexual harassment on the job

Far fewer men than women fundraisers have faced sexual harassment on the job

96 percent of people who harass fundraisers are men

## Share Who Have Experienced or Witnessed Harassment

Yes, a friend or colleague of mine told me they have been sexually harassed in the fundraising profession.

26%

Yes, I have personally been sexually harassed in the fundraising profession.

21%

Yes, I have witnessed sexual harassment in the fundraising profession.

16%

No, I have not personally heard about, witnessed, or personally experienced sexual harassment in the fundraising profession.

52%

Because women are the main targets of sexual misconduct, nonprofit leaders say that organizations need to make it a priority to create safe workplaces and to pay attention to broad gender and power dynamics that have permeated fundraising for decades. Beth Ann Locke, a fundraiser at Simon Fraser University who's written about sexual abuse at nonprofits, says it's critical that organizations take seriously reports of misconduct and send a message to their employees: "We don't value donor dollars more than we value your personal safety or personal dignity."

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But equally important, say a growing number of nonprofit and foundation executives, is to focus on power dynamics. While 70 percent of fundraisers are women, according to data from the Association of Fundraising Professionals, chief-executive and board jobs, especially at elite nonprofits, are often held by men.

Lisa Eisen, vice president of the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, announced last month a new effort involving other grant makers to help nonprofits build equitable workplaces.

“You start with the issues of harassment and misconduct, but you very quickly get to equity and women’s leadership,” says Eisen. “I’m hoping by addressing some of the more egregious problems that we will start addressing the need to have gender equity in terms of pay and in terms of opportunity and in terms of leadership.”

## Many Donors Cross Lines

The survey released today is based on information provided by 1,040 members of the Association of Fundraising Professionals. Most of those who participated raise money at nonprofits or work as consultants to nonprofits. The people polled were employed by nonprofits in the United States, but 106 work in Canada.

The *Chronicle* joined forces with the association because no other studies had estimated the extent of the harassment problem in the fundraiser work force. Of those who had been harassed, 65 percent said a donor was the culprit in at least one incident. Only 39 percent of fundraisers who had faced wrongdoing said offenders have been co-workers, managers, executives, or board members.

Thirty-five percent also said board members — who often make big gifts to organizations — have been at fault in at least one instance.

## Who the Perpetrators Are

Fundraisers who have been harassed ...

**65%** said at least **one offender was a donor**

Fundraisers who have been harassed said at least one offender was a ...

Note: Fundraisers who were harassed more than once may have selected more than one perpetrator.

## Colleagues Who Sexually Harass

Junior to you	2%	
The same level as you	11%	
In a superior position to you		70%
Unsure	19%	

Big donors have a lot of influence over nonprofits, especially because many fundraisers are rated on their ability to pull in large donations. Adding to the challenge: Meetings with donors often occur in intimate settings, like in homes, at bars, or in restaurants — increasing the odds that harassment will take place, experts say.

“Harassment is always about power, so the results here might indicate that the real power in these organizations rests with the donors,” says Jerry Carbo, a professor at Shippensburg University who served on a federal committee studying harassment in the workplace in 2015 and 2016. “I would normally expect to see a much higher response rate for supervisors.”

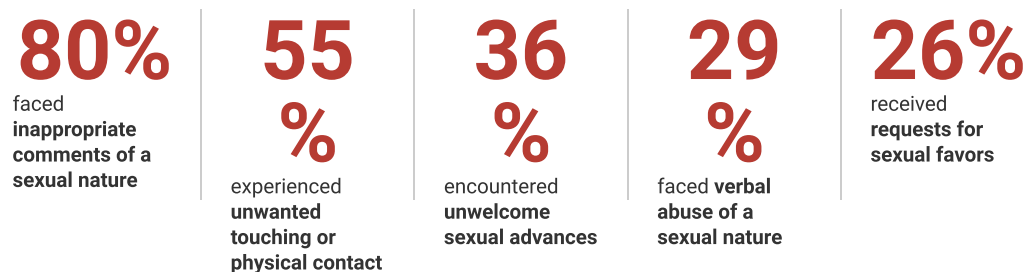
Some 18 percent of fundraisers who reported being harassed said their direct supervisor or manager was to blame in at least one case. Eighteen percent also listed an executive-level colleague as an offender.

## Types of Harassment

Most of the harassment that fundraisers encountered came in the form of inappropriate sexual comments. Eighty percent of fundraisers who had been harassed said they had experienced inappropriate sexual comments in their careers. About one quarter of fundraisers said they had been asked for sexual favors.

## Most Common Forms of Sexual Harassment

Of the fundraisers who said they'd been harassed ...

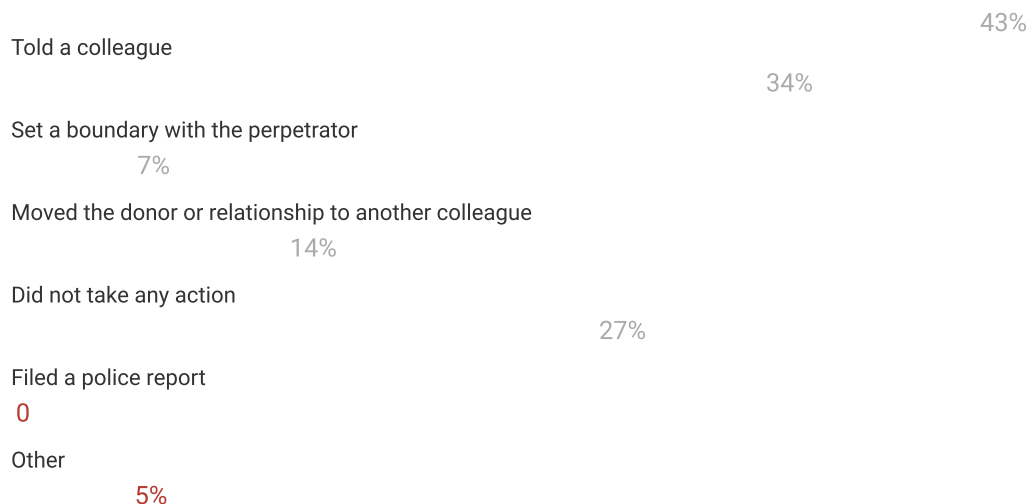


Though 43 percent of fundraisers who experienced harassment reported incidents to their organizations, some 27 percent reported taking no action. Others took smaller steps, like distancing themselves from offenders.

A little more than one-quarter of fundraisers said they'd heard about or witnessed sexual harassment but took no action.

## What Actions Victims Took

Told the organization



Those numbers are troubling, says Cynthia Calvert, a lawyer who advises nonprofits and companies on sexual misconduct complaints and policies.

Still, they are not uncommon. She notes that a CareerBuilder survey released in January, also conducted by the Harris Poll, found that 72 percent of workers across the nation who had experienced harassment on the job did not report the incidents — which suggests that nonprofits are doing better at fostering cultures in which people feel they can come forward with complaints. Nevertheless, she says, if anyone refrains from reporting harassment, it’s a problem. “Organizations should not rest until those numbers are zero,” Calvert said in an email.

The results also underscore the need for nonprofits to conduct training to help people who witness harassment better understand how they might respond when they witness misconduct, says Sarah Beaulieu, a former university fundraiser and founder of the Uncomfortable Conversation, an organization that creates educational videos on sexual harassment.

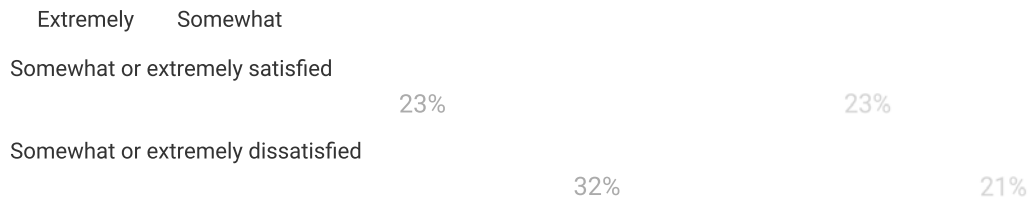
Many fundraisers who have reported harassment to organizations said they were unhappy with the results. Slightly more than half said they were either somewhat dissatisfied or extremely dissatisfied with how the organization handled their allegations. About 45 percent said the organization took no action after they reported an incident, and 13 percent said their allegations were minimized. (Harris pointed out that these figures should be read with caution because of the small percentage of people who gave this response.)

Those figures are a “red flag,” says Calvert, and probably mean that nonprofits’ human-resources officials need training on how to handle complaints.

## Fundraisers’ Level of Satisfaction With the

## Nonprofit's Response

Note: Because only a small share of fundraisers reported harassment, this percentage comes from a small sample size.



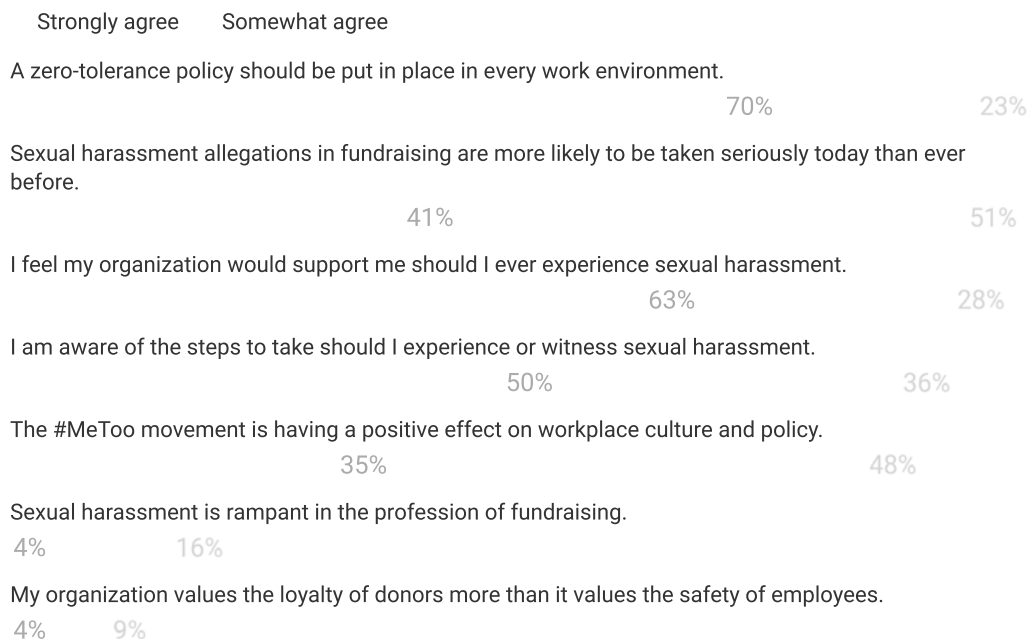
## #MeToo's Impact

Many fundraisers said they were encouraged by the changes brought about as women across the nation have more openly discussed their concerns about harassment — and harassers at nonprofits and elsewhere have been forced to step down as a result. Some 35 percent of fundraisers strongly agreed that the #MeToo movement is having a positive effect on workplace culture and policy, while 48 percent somewhat agreed. About 18 percent strongly or somewhat disagreed.

Sixty-one percent of fundraisers agreed that people have a better understanding of harassment given all the recent coverage of sexual misconduct in the news media, while 18 percent disagreed, and 21 percent said they were unsure.

Almost all of those polled — 93 percent — either agreed or somewhat agreed that a zero-tolerance policy on sexual harassment should be enforced in every work environment.

## Opinions About Harassment in the Workplace



## Is Fundraising Unique?

Polls and studies offer a wide range of figures on the prevalence of sexual harassment in workplaces. A 2016 U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission report found that 25 percent to 85 percent of women reported experiencing sexual harassment at work — which would put fundraisers' experiences with misconduct in line the agency's more conservative estimate.

The report noted that when surveys asked about specific kinds of misconduct — like unwanted touching, attention, or comments — reported harassment was higher than when the term “sexual harassment” was undefined.

The *Chronicle* and AFP poll hinted at the kinds of sexual harassment it was trying to measure but did not define it throughout, which could have lowered the number of people who reported abuse, experts say.

Also, people who belong to a professional association like AFP may already have good feelings about the field, notes Ariane Hegewisch, an official at the Institute for Women's Policy Research, who has studied harassment in the workplace. What's more, people who left fundraising because they were harassed were not surveyed, she says.

## Sexual Harassment and Fundraising: A Landmark Poll

Download a [copy](#) of Harris Poll's summary of the key findings and all the data on the poll commissioned by the Chronicle of Philanthropy and the Association of Fundraising Professionals.

Still, Harris says AFP's membership list — which consisted of more than 20,000 people — offered a way to poll those working in fundraising specifically. Without that list, doing such a targeted survey would have been very difficult, says David Krane, director of the Harris Poll's research team.

Krane notes that an early question did hint at the types of harassment the survey was seeking to capture, but he acknowledges that it was not defined throughout the survey — including in a question where respondents were specifically asked if they had experienced sexual harassment in the fundraising field. It's possible that if the survey had listed all types of harassment — inappropriate comments, unwanted touching, and so forth — the results might have been different, he says.

That said, Krane also notes that the survey was conducted in the midst of heavy news coverage of sexual harassment — which means it would have likely been top of mind for many people.

Carbo, of Shippensburg University, agrees, but he notes that it's still striking that so many fundraisers who care enough to join a group like AFP report being harassed. "It shows how problematic it is," he said, "because you are dealing with people who are proud to be part of the fundraising profession — and still, one in four reporting."

*Megan O'Neil contributed to this article.*

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### Timothy Sandoval

Sandoval covered nonprofit fundraising for *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*. He wrote on a variety of subjects including nonprofits' reactions to the election of Donald Trump, questionable spending at a major veterans charity, and clever Valentine's Day appeals.

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