

# AFP Update and News

## Fundraisers More Committed To Causes Than Organizations?

Michael Nilsen

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Fundraisers might be more committed to the causes their organizations serve than the organizations themselves, according to new research sponsored by the AFP Foundation for Philanthropy.

*The Revolving Door: A Study on the Voluntary Turnover (Intent to Stay) of Fundraisers in the Nonprofit Sector* examined how long fundraisers are staying at their current position and their primary reasons for leaving. The research was conducted by Aleah Horstman, Ph.D., director of major and planned gifts for Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains in Denver.

The average length of service for participants in the study was 3.6 years. Females averaged 3.50 years, while males averaged 4.17 years. These averages are similar to figures seen in other recent studies about the length of fundraiser service.

The education sector made up 27.8 percent of the 169 respondents and was the largest subgroup in the study.

While much has been made about the short amount of time fundraisers spend at their particular jobs, a 2002 study (*Employees: Recruitment, Retention and Loyalty*, Drizin) found that among all the sectors (nonprofit, for-profit and government), the average employee stays in his or her job 3.4 years. However, as the study notes, problems with frequent fundraiser turnover can be more acute than other professions given the donor–fundraiser relationship and the amount of contributions that could be lost as new fundraisers are trained and brought up to speed.

### Staying or Going

The survey found seven key variables that can help predict fundraisers' intent to stay at their current jobs:

1. Job satisfaction
2. Commitment to mission

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**Author's Contact Address:**

Michael Nilsen, Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP)  
4300 Wilson Blvd., #300, Arlington, VA 22203, USA  
E-mail: mnilsen@afpnet.org



3. Distributive justice, equity (i.e., rewards and promotions are perceived as equal for all employees)
4. Promotional chances
5. Job involvement
6. Support of supervisor
7. Search behavior.

While a fundraiser's commitment to the mission of his or her current organization was very important, organizational commitment was not found to be a significant factor. This result is quite different from traditional job turnover models used in the for-profit sector by human resources and organizational management scholars. Horstman calls for additional research in this area, but conjectures that organizational commitment may be different in nonprofits than in for-profits, or simply that a fundraiser's loyalty to a cause displaces the typical loyalty a worker might have for his or her organization.

Another area where fundraising behavior was different than the norm was in search behavior—how much job-searching activity a fundraiser undertakes before taking a new position. Most job turnover models do not give search behavior a significant role, but it was a major factor in the study. The result suggests that finding new fundraising jobs remains quite easy for most fundraisers, and that when the timing is right, job-searching activity typically leads to a new position. Horstman points out that with the internet, finding new fundraising jobs is much easier than in the past, especially with organizations such as AFP and its chapters offering online job banks that are accessible anytime.

## Keeping Fundraisers Happy

The research has a number of important practical applications that charities can use right away to help ensure that their fundraising employees remain satisfied at their current positions.

For example, Horstman found five sub-factors that were critical in establishing overall job satisfaction: autonomy (positive), promotional chances (positive), support of coworkers (positive), opportunity (negative) and stress from unrealistic fundraising goals (negative). According to the research, organizations can be proactive in encouraging high job satisfaction among their fundraisers by focusing on these five determinants, and several specific examples are listed in the report.

Job involvement—fundraisers' need to be key players within their organizations and have a sense of control over their positions—is another area where organizational leadership can take pro-active steps to increase loyalty. The first suggestion is for supervisors to work directly with their fundraising staff to identify which parts of their job they most value and feel confident and determine ways to increase and enhance those job activities. The goal for supervisors should be to assist fundraisers in shaping their job description to match their passions and skills.

## AFP Compensation and Benefits Study

AFP recently released its 2007 Compensation Benefits Study (log-in required). While the survey does not ask the same questions as Horstman's



research, several findings are consonant with her results.

Eighty-four percent of US respondents and 84 percent of Canadian respondents to the AFP survey agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I feel very committed to the sector in which I am currently employed." However, about half of the respondents did not indicate willingness to work for less pay in order to continue to work in the sector in which they are currently employed. On the other hand, a majority of respondents (60 percent of US respondents and 65 percent of Canadians) agreed or strongly agreed that their chances for career advancement in their current work sector are good.

Clearly, fundraisers are committed to the sector to a significant extent and see many opportunities for advancement within the sector. This may explain why many leave their current positions for other jobs within the profession.

Several questions were added to the AFP survey to try to ascertain reasons for job leaving. The top responses were to earn a higher salary (36 percent for US respondents and 37 percent for Canadians), frustration with the work environment (27 percent for US respondents and 30 percent for Canadians), to engage in more interesting or challenging work

(23 percent for US respondents and 26 percent for Canadians), greater opportunities for career advancement elsewhere (23 percent for US respondents and 24 percent for Canadians), because work expectations are unrealistic (16 percent for US respondents and 19 percent for Canadians), and because of a lack of a sense of recognition for one's work (15 percent for US and 19 percent for Canadians).

### **About the Studies**

The research was based on the results of a survey completed by 169 fundraisers whose names were provided by AFP and another fundraising organization that wished to remain anonymous. The methodology of this research was greatly influenced by James L. Price, professor emeritus at The University of Iowa, and the CMT (Causal Model of Turnover). Methodological decisions mirrored those of previous CMT studies in order to maintain as much of the validity and reliability of the model and its measurement tool as possible.

### **About the Researcher**

Aleah Horstman received her Ph.D. from The University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center's School of Public Affairs in 2006. She can be reached at 303-589-7712 or [aleah.horstman@pprm.org](mailto:aleah.horstman@pprm.org).