Advancement Leaders Speak 2022

Fundraising Leadership In the New Normal

HOW CAN WE BEST ENGAGE DONORS IN A TIME OF CHANGE?

It's a challenging time for donor engagement. While a historic wealth transfer is fueling record giving by mega-philanthropists, national participation in traditional giving has declined. With the large list of competing causes and a challenging environment to capture donor attention, fundraisers face a major challenge to grow donors in a time of need.

The pandemic also disrupted the thinking of "we've always done it this way." Fundraisers were forced to adapt quickly because the need for philanthropy was immediate and donors wanted to take action. As the next phase of the pandemic unfolds, RNL wanted to get the pulse of fundraisers on key strategies and challenges for the year ahead.

To help fundraisers better understand those challenges, strategies, and trends in donor engagement, RNL conducted a nationwide survey of fundraising leaders. This report contains their insights and data on:

- Trends in usage of donor engagement channels.
- Key priorities, challenges, and opportunities.
- The landscape for talent management and employee retention.
- What we can learn from top commercial brands to fuel the donor experience.

About the survey respondents

153 FUNDRAISERS

This report is based on responses from 153 fundraisers polled in spring 2022. The survey was conducted electronically with an open call to advancement professionals.

PUBLIC COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Up to 5,000 enrollment **10%**

5,000-10,000 enrollment **8%**

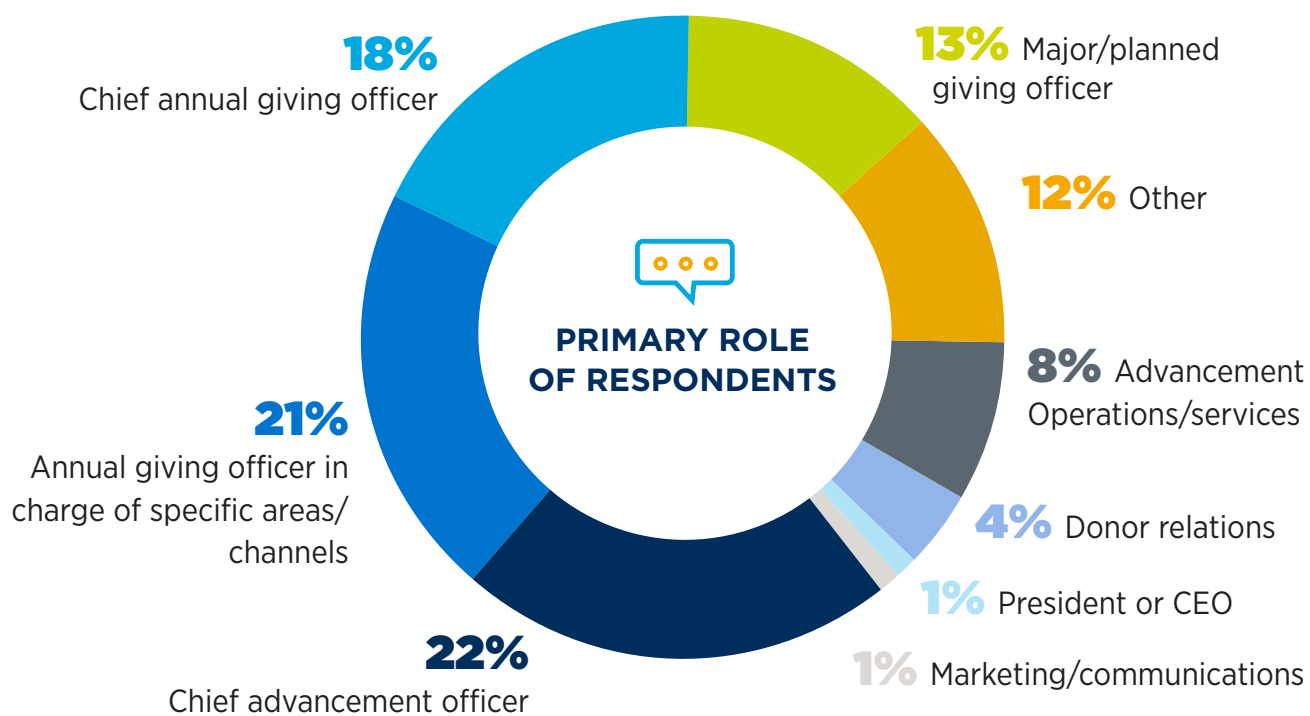Over 10,000 enrollment **44%**

PRIVATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Up to 5,000 enrollment **29%**

5,000-10,000 enrollment **4%**

Over 10,000 enrollment **4%**

CHARITIES

All charities **2%**

PRIMARY ROLE OF RESPONDENTS

- 13% Major/planned giving officer
- 12% Other
- 8% Advancement Operations/services
- 4% Donor relations
- 1% President or CEO
- 1% Marketing/communications
- 22% Chief advancement officer
- 21% Annual giving officer in charge of specific areas/channels
- 18% Chief annual giving officer

What are your best strategies for donor engagement?

Talk with our fundraising experts about the right strategies and solutions for engaging donors and exciting them about giving.

Visit **RNL.com/DonorTalk**

TOP FUNDRAISER PRIORITIES

Fundraisers reviewed a list of activities and strategies and were asked to rank them according to priority.

Highest priority activities for fundraisers

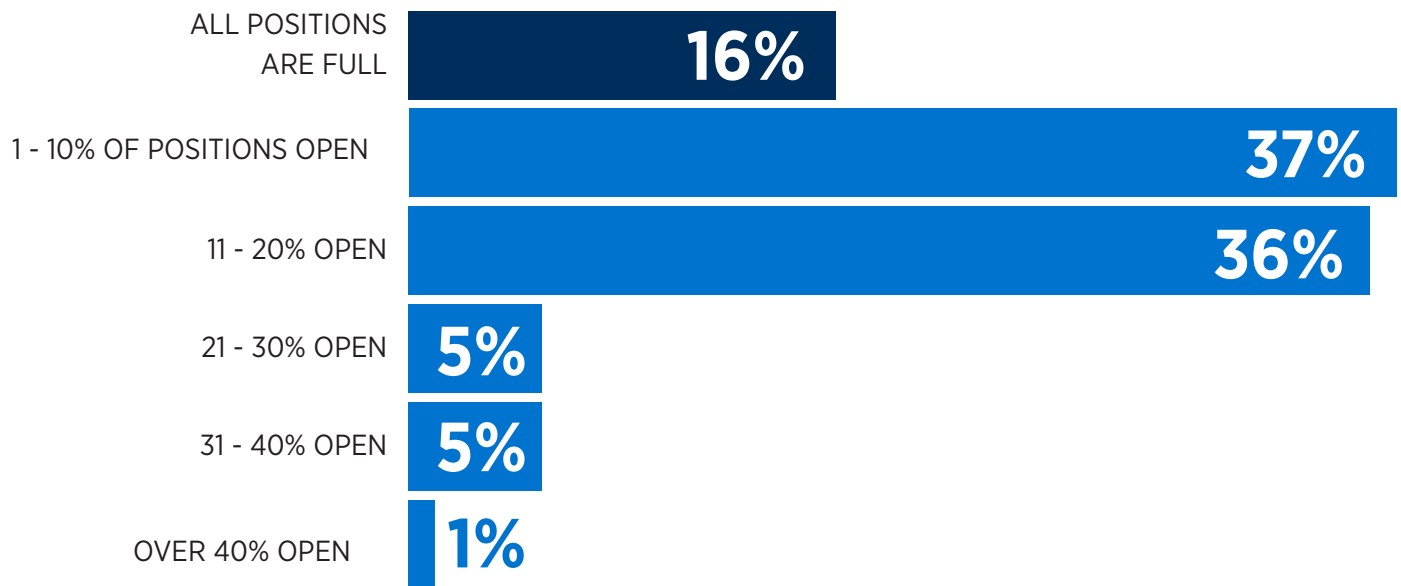| ACTIVITY/STRATEGY	NOT A PRIORITY	LOW	MODERATE	HIGH
Booking major gifts	2%	2%	14%	81%
Increasing the number of donors giving on an annual basis	--	10%	32%	58%
Growing total annual giving dollars	--	6%	40%	54%
Booking planned gifts	4%	11%	37%	48%
Growing alumni participation	2%	20%	32%	46%
Recruiting/retaining key talent on our team	11%	18%	28%	42%
Making it easier to give	2%	20%	38%	40%
Engaging our constituents better	--	13%	47%	40%
Improving the donor experience	1%	12%	49%	38%
Improving our communications across mail, email, and digital	1%	14%	47%	38%
Completing the current campaign	44%	7%	12%	37%
Growing budget relieving or unrestricted dollars	5%	15%	46%	34%
Boosting morale on our teams	9%	26%	34%	30%
Preparing for the next campaign	14%	19%	38%	29%
Adopting new technology	8%	31%	37%	24%
Seeking greater synergy across channels of outreach	5%	24%	50%	21%
Embracing new giving methods (like DAFs, crypto, giving circles, etc.)	8%	44%	35%	13%

We asked fundraisers if we missed anything as key priorities, and the most common responses were:

- Diversity, equity, and inclusion on boards and with donors.
- Team cohesion, communication, and collaboration following isolation.
- Engaging top institutional leaders in fundraising.
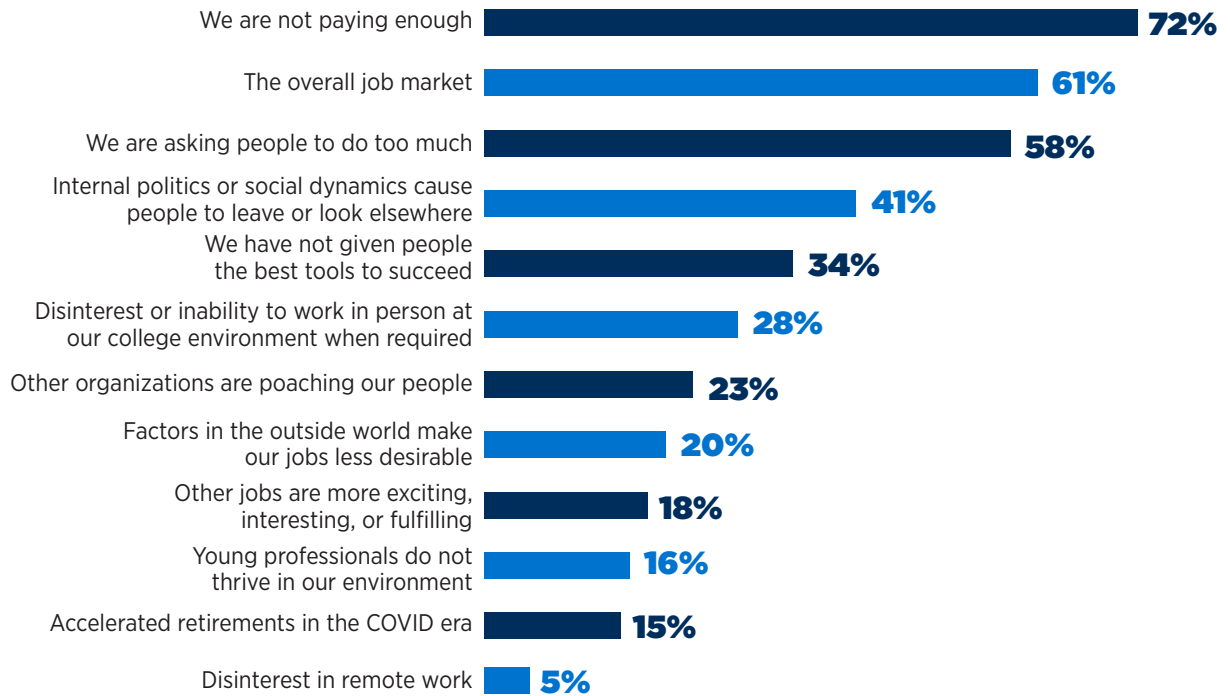- Investing in using data effectively.

THE FUNDRAISING TALENT LANDSCAPE

Hiring and employee retention are also significant challenges for fundraising leaders. Nearly nine out of ten of our respondents said they had open positions they were looking to fill at their institution or organization. They also shared their insights into what was causing turnover.

Percentage of current open advancement positions fundraisers are seeking to fill

ALL POSITIONS ARE FULL	16%
1 - 10% OF POSITIONS OPEN	37%
11 - 20% OPEN	36%
21 - 30% OPEN	5%
31 - 40% OPEN	5%
OVER 40% OPEN	1%

84% of fundraising shops have open positions

Factors contributing to turnover in advancement

Factor	Percentage
We are not paying enough	72%
The overall job market	61%
We are asking people to do too much	58%
Internal politics or social dynamics cause people to leave or look elsewhere	41%
We have not given people the best tools to succeed	34%
Disinterest or inability to work in person at our college environment when required	28%
Other organizations are poaching our people	23%
Factors in the outside world make our jobs less desirable	20%
Other jobs are more exciting, interesting, or fulfilling	18%
Young professionals do not thrive in our environment	16%
Accelerated retirements in the COVID era	15%
Disinterest in remote work	5%

We asked if we missed anything that might be impact fundraiser turnover or hiring challenges. Here were the most common responses:

- Management failures
- Team culture
- Budget slowing down hiring

- Leadership changes
- Communication of expectations/goals
- Small applicant pools

ADVANCEMENT LEADERS SPEAK

Turnover and hiring
(Comments from respondents)

Budgetary constraints have slowed down our hiring process such that we can't keep pace with the market.

There is a severe misunderstanding of what those in advancement do that I believe starts as students.

There's a lack of investment in infrastructure and under-staffing for behind-the-scenes operational work. This creates an overworked team in lower salary positions and front-line fundraisers who do not receive the data/resources they want.

I think **people are just burned out.**

How can we boost our advancement teams?

WHAT DO YOU THINK WE COULD DO TO BETTER RECRUIT, RETAIN, AND SUPPORT OUR TEAM MEMBERS?

(most common responses)

Pay

Education

Office Culture

Flexible Work

Transparency

Support

Communication

Retention, Morale, and Teamwork

ADVANCEMENT LEADERS SPEAK

Realistic expectations on meeting goals that are based on data.

Staff are overlooked and treated as dispensable. The regular turnover in staff creates an unstable and unsustainable infrastructure, interfering with the ability of the campus to pursue aggressive initiatives.

We can integrate advancement team members into the larger institution more systematically.

Advancement seems to be a field where everyone works individually on projects, when assisting each other would improve the work.

We need better advancement/ personal **growth tracks**. It's too rigid and inflexible right now.

Offer more remote work-from-home opportunities or at least a few days per week with **flexibility**.

FUNDRAISING TECHNOLOGY AND COMMUNICATIONS

Digital engagement and communications have become crucial to fundraising, but that has also created an increasing challenge for fundraisers to integrate technology into their outreach and also engage donors on a wider range of channels. We asked fundraisers how they are integrating technology and omnichannel communications into their efforts.

To what degree are various channels working together, sharing data, and providing a quality donor experience?

Integration of fundraising technology
(sorted by "very integrated")

TECHNOLOGY	WE DO NOT DO THIS	NOT INTEGRATED AT ALL	SOMEWHAT INTEGRATED	VERY INTEGRATED
Email	1%	7%	44%	48%
Giving days	10%	9%	39%	43%
Crowdfunding	21%	22%	34%	24%
Calling	12%	20%	46%	22%
Engagement center (formerly "phonathon")	34%	13%	35%	18%
Texting	24%	23%	39%	14%
Video messages	24%	19%	48%	9%
Predictive analytics (data that guide outreach)	28%	26%	38%	8%

Improving the use of technology

A single platform or one that connects them all, instead of piecemeal.

Better live reporting to help us understand which efforts are working, allowing us to be proactive in identifying and soliciting audiences who are most likely to give.

We need more people who know ways to better integrate technologies, and then the resources to purchase those services.

Single source instead of multiple vendors.

Being able to seamlessly integrate all of our disparate technology stack with our CRM.

Fundraising channels are evolving

Respondents also showed that they use wider variety of channels and methods for different fundraising goals. They also noted that some channels are better served for different goals.

CHANNELS THAT HAVE "HIGH VALUE" FOR KEY FUNDRAISING GOALS

CHANNEL	NEW DONOR ACQUISITION	ANNUAL GIVING REVENUE	LEADERSHIP GIVING	MAJOR/ PLANNED GIFTS
Email	46%	76%	32%	29%
Video messages	27%	63%	57%	35%
Calling	43%	58%	46%	46%
Texting	44%	80%	19%	15%
In-person meetings	26%	20%	79%	93%
Virtual meetings	31%	45%	71%	69%
Crowdfunding	78%	80%	15%	6%
Giving days	80%	84%	41%	19%

The value of personal conversations with donors

ADVANCEMENT LEADERS SPEAK

You gain a perspective on why they give to your organization.

The only **real chance to fully understand** what donors say/mean and what motivates them.

When students have a conversation with a donor... it can help us target donors who are interested and satisfied by comparing their interests.

You can't raise a major gift without personal and tailored interaction.

Very high value for stewardship, cultivation, and engagement.

It's still of high value in today's society where everyone is overloaded with digital marketing/asks. When it comes to major gifts and new donor acquisition, **personal relationships are KEY!**

It brings in the **emotional connection** when the other communication channels don't deliver.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The biggest challenges in advancement

WHAT ARE YOUR GREATEST CHALLENGES IN FURTHERING YOUR INSTITUTION'S ADVANCEMENT GOALS RIGHT NOW?

Young alumni giving

Data analysis

The economy

Budget

Staffing

New Staff

Too many/competing priorities

Turnover

Communication

Technology

Key challenges

New donor acquisition. Finding new ways to engage younger donors is a challenge.

Declining trust in institutions culturally means we have an uphill battle **convincing young alumni that we're a cause worthy of investment.**

Leadership turnover slows us down. Introducing new players in a virtual world is difficult.

Underdeveloped donor pool, a difficult CRM, and new staff.

Lack of empathy for one another and challenges created by the pandemic that are unresolved.

Budget.
We have great ideas and plans but not enough funds to handle everything at the moment.

Lack of investment in staff and lack of operating/unrestricted funds.

Things that will transform donor engagement

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE HOLDS THE BIGGEST PROMISE FOR MEETING YOUR GOALS AND IMPROVING THE DONOR EXPERIENCE?

- Digital engagement
- Centralization
- New systems
- Personal conversations
- Integrated technology
- Personalized communications
- Student philanthropy
- Artificial intelligence
- Impact communications
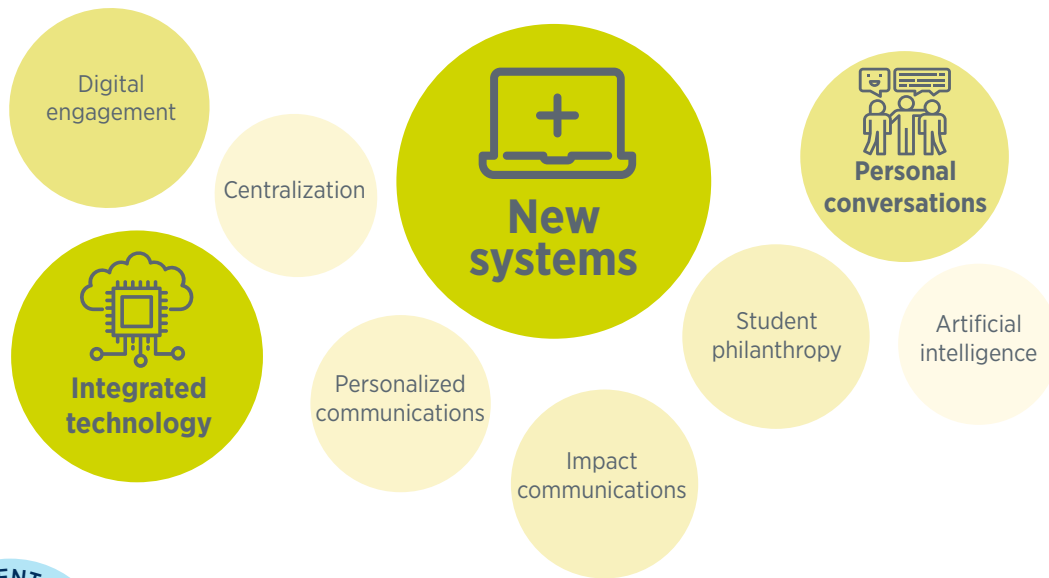
Transforming donor engagement

Advances in new technology and flexibility have equipped us with tools to make our work more engaging, and we've just started to scratch the surface of their potential.

A solid team. Trying new technology and embracing new ideas along with student philanthropy initiatives on campus.

Personal connections. The phonathon program has boomed this last year, and I believe it's in part people's desire to once again connect with those around them. So many people lacked human interaction or so long that even a call from a student you don't know can be the highlight of someone's day.

I believe that truly being able to integrate an omni-channel strategy that is informed by **AI and machine learning** would allow for new growth in my program.

Leveraging learnings from the pandemic (virtual tools, etc.) to complement more traditional approaches to increase efficiency and reach new audiences.

Showing donors what their investment can accomplish so they know they are making a difference in the lives of our students.

The information fundraisers need to be successful

WHERE DO YOU WISH YOU HAD MORE INFORMATION, INSIGHT, OR STRATEGY TO HELP WITH YOUR FUNDRAISING AND ENGAGEMENT WORK?

Reporting

Crowdfunding

Young alumni engagement

Predictive analytics

Engagement metrics

Giving impact examples

Actionable data

Giving day

Prospect employment

Benchmarking

Contact info

Strategy

Actionable intelligence

I wish I had more information on historical asks: when they were made, at what levels, who made them, etc. That way we could create custom multi-year plans for annual giving prospects, not just major gift prospects.

More information, insight, or strategy into student philanthropy and how to incorporate students and young alumni in giving would be very interesting to know.

Predictive modeling/personalized donor journeys at scale.

How to combine giving efforts with campaign and major donor efforts or how planned giving and annual giving can work together. This work can become siloed and it ultimately needs to complement each other to be successful.

More data integrity, regular append processes, and synergy across our channels to **predict the best way to solicit the donor** instead of sending them everything.

THE DONOR EXPERIENCE

Learning from great brands to fuel a better donor experience

Donor expectations from fundraisers are shaped by their experiences with brands outside of fundraising: online retailers, content providers, social media platforms, service providers, and so on. Advancement leaders told us what brands provide a great experience and what we can learn from them to improve our donor engagement.

BRANDS THAT ADVANCEMENT LEADERS SAY PROVIDE A GREAT EXPERIENCE

According to fundraising leaders, how do these brands provide a great experience? Is there anything that could help fundraisers with their advancement work?

- Relevance of content
- Ease of use
- Great visual content
- Humor
- Attention grabbing
- Excitement

- Sense of community
- Personalization
- Great communication
- Blend of engagement/sale

Brand experience and donor engagement

They do a great job of making something run-of-the-mill (ordering deodorant!) feel exciting. When you place an order, they send a celebratory email.

They are ALWAYS available. I can chat/email whenever needed.

Recurring gifts (monthly subscriptions), communications, and a sneak-peek at what's coming... a feeling of community.

The predictive modeling can help in the timing, channel choice, and messaging we use for our constituents.

The fact that they 'assign' someone to stay on the phone with you for a significant amount of time (often hours) to help you fix your problem makes the experience more personal and makes you feel like the company cares.

Their branding is hilarious, their email breaks through the monotony of everything else in my email box.

Constantly evolving the data to reflect my current listening and recommendations...

Multichannel marketing offers that are specific and **relevant to me.**

They do consistent follow up.

5 KEY TAKEAWAYS

Donor engagement is the new normal

Based on the responses to this survey and what we are hearing from the hundreds of RNL partners we have visited with this year, the following five takeaways stand out as we move forward with philanthropic campaigns and engage donors to make a difference.

(1) **Fundraisers and donors want more integration.** The channels you use to engage donors have to talk to each other, operate with coordinated efficiency, and rely on key data to improve the donor experience.

(2) **Personal conversations matter.** Whether it's on Zoom, in the living room, or through student ambassadors, donors and fundraisers see real value in conversation. Listening to donors can uncover their passions, course correct your appeal strategy, and make giving more sticky to build long-term investment.

(3) **Keeping fundraising talent requires investment.** Better pay, investing in social and emotional support, providing better systems for fundraising professionals…these are just some of the things our respondents mentioned that go beyond simply filling open positions. Institutions need to invest in their talent, provide them with the tools to succeed, and create an environment where fundraisers feel valued, supported, and enabled is crucial.

(4) **The right tools can boost your results and your pipeline.** It's not just about filling positions. Providing fundraiser support—from great communications that warm donors, data that can direct efforts effectively, and even help with qualification outreach—can make a big difference.

(5) **Actionable intelligence is key to drive the donor experience.** The brands and experiences we stick with provide a personalized experience at scale. Emerging technologies and new donor engagement strategies can make giving more fun, impactful, and individual.

ABOUT RNL

RNL is the leading provider of higher education enrollment, student success, and fundraising solutions. More than 1,900 colleges, universities, and nonprofit organizations rely on RNL for advanced analytics, personalized engagement, and industry-leading insights to achieve their missions. The firm is distinguished by its powerful portfolio of solutions focused on the entire lifecycle of enrollment and fundraising, assuring students find the right college or university, graduate on time, secure their first job, and give back to support the next generation. RNL conferences, research reports, papers, and articles help clients stay on top of current trends.

Visit **RuffaloNL.com**

How can you maximize donor engagement in a time of change?

Contact RNL to talk with our fundraising experts. We can discuss the strategies and solutions that boost engagement and help you meet goals with high ROI.

Ask for a complimentary consultation at **RNL.com/FundraisingConsult**

Visit RuffaloNL.com/Fundraising
Email **ContactUs@RuffaloNL.com**
Call **800.876.1117**

How to cite this report

RNL (2022). *Advancement Leaders Speak 2022.* Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Ruffalo Noel Levitz. Available at: **RNL.com/ALS2022**