Education Advisory Board | Advancement Forum

Collaboration between Prospect Research Units and Frontline Fundraisers

Research Brief

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Advancement Forum

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Table of Contents

1) Executive Overview

Key Observations

The exact roles and purposes of research and analytics offices shift over time, with shifts attributable to leadership turnover, staff limitations, and the development of new tools or services. Each factor can increase or decrease the visibility and perceived value of research and analytics office functions, which can affect how frequently other staff interact with or utilize the research unit. Offices combat these perception shifts by developing a clear identity that positions research and analytics as helpful services that bolster the division's strategy and further its goals.

Research and analytics administrators utilize both top-down (i.e., leadership-directed) and bottom-up (i.e., peer-to-peer) approaches to encourage stronger relationships between research and analytics staff and frontline fundraisers. Contacts emphasize the importance of identifying allies at all levels of the development division to advocate for research and analytics services. Research and analytics administrators target development leaders at the assistant vice president or vice president level to promote the value of the research and analytics staff and their services. Office staff reach out to gift officers and their assistants to train them on updated tools and demonstrate those tools' capabilities. The newly-trained fundraisers can then promote products to peers in the development unit.

To create a collaborative environment between frontline fundraisers and research and analytics staff, administrators implement both formal (e.g., advisory committees) and informal (e.g., happy hours and social events) channels for feedback and relationship-building. While strong relationships between research and analytics offices and frontline fundraisers represent each side's best interests, the burden for initiating these processes often falls to the research team. Generally, development divisions have introduced or expanded research and analytics offices in recent years, requiring offices to proactively promote research and analytics services to unfamiliar development division staff.

Research and analytics offices prefer to develop proactive tools and services, rather than perform reactive research requests. While many frontline fundraisers rely on standard prospect information (e.g., biographical reports), researchers and analysts express enthusiasm to develop more advanced tools, especially as the capabilities of data analytics and predictive modeling systems become more robust. Because research and analytics administrators recognize that gift officers may resist change, contacts frame new tools and processes in a manner that indicates value and purpose to frontline staff and minimizes disruptions to existing services.

2) Research and Analytics Office Organization

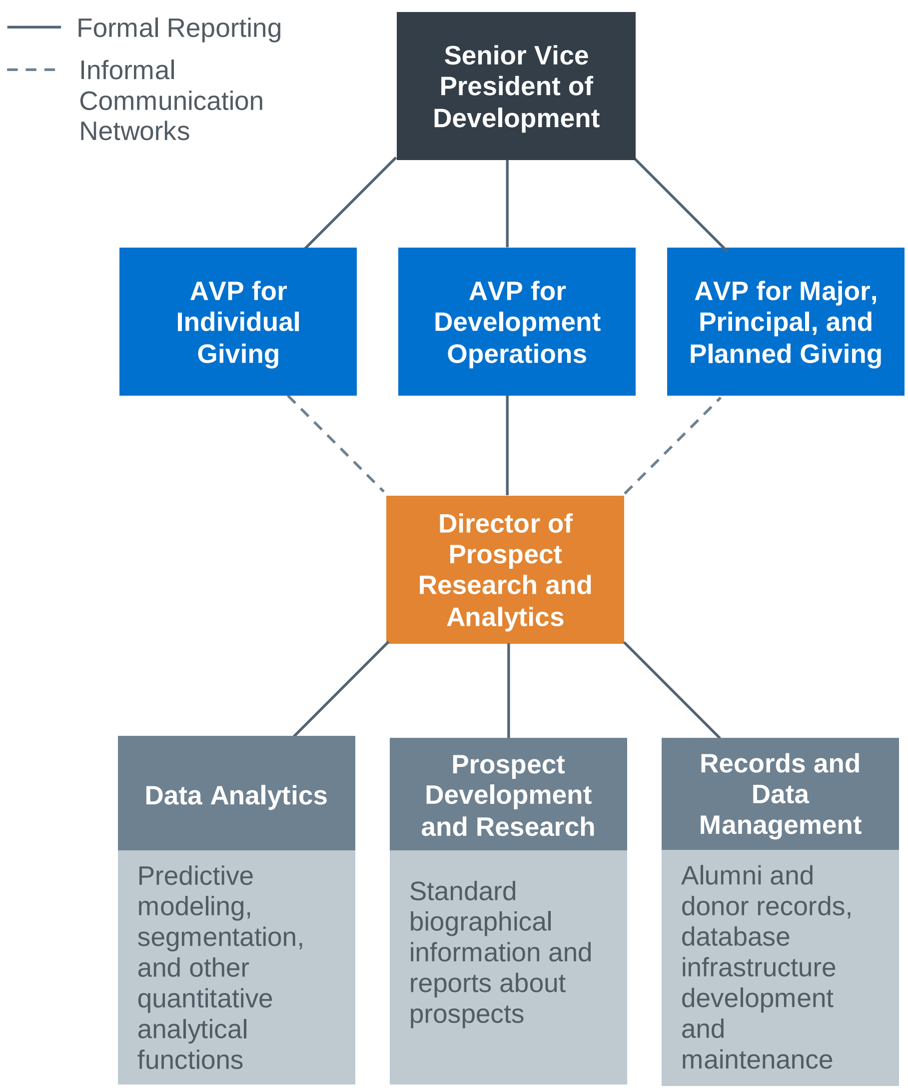
Organizational Structures

Reporting Structures Frequently Shift After Leadership Turnover

Three of five contacts at profiled institutions report changes to the reporting structure for research and analytics offices within the last five to six years. When senior administrators who oversee research and analytics offices depart the institution, divisions may shift sub-units into the portfolio of other senior leaders who may not have strong familiarity with research or analytics functions.

Most frequently, the director of the research and analytics program reports to a vice president of development operations with a wide array of responsibilities outside of research. At **Institution A** and previously at **Institution B**, the vice president for major gifts oversees the research and analytics office. Contacts stress that research and analytics offices should serve all development sub-units with research needs regardless of formal reporting structure.

Sample Organizational Structure for Research and Analytics Offices



Liaison Models Establish Formalized Relationships between Researchers and Gift Officers

The development divisions at three of five profiled institutions employ liaison systems, with researchers serving a small group of frontline fundraisers in a giving program. Formalized relationships between researchers and gift officers typically lead to more communication than exists in non-liaison systems.

The liaison system can also produce inequitable divisions of work because of differences in gift officers' prospect portfolios, experience levels, and willingness to request research. At **Institution B**, fundraisers associated with the divinity school generate nearly twice as much work for research and analytics staff as fundraisers associated with the school of engineering. Though both programs have comparable size and significance, the workloads differ because gift officers for the divinity school request more information. At **Institution C**, some gift officers with rapidly changing portfolios may meet with researchers as often as once per week, while other gift officers meet their researchers only monthly.

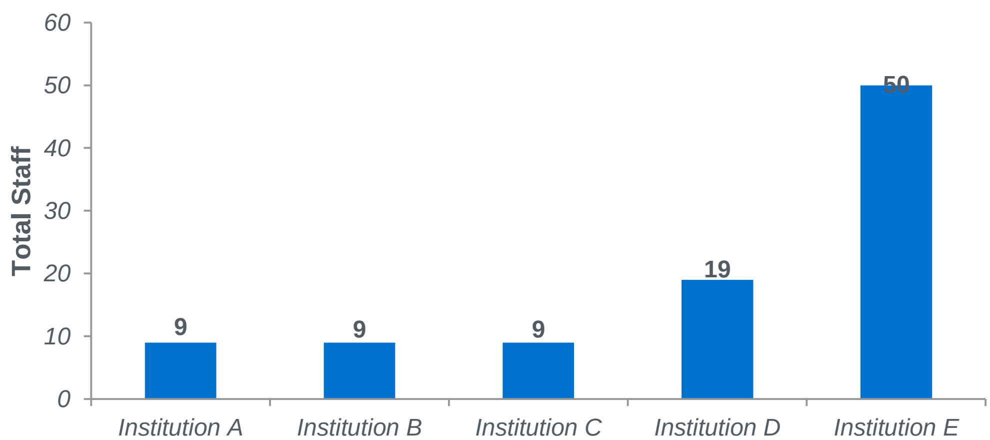
Resources

Staffing Constraints Reduce Capacity for Reactive Research Requests

Four of five contacts at profiled institutions express a desire to add staff in either research or support roles. Recent leadership turnover at several profiled institutions has stretched staff as advocates for research and analytics depart or as development divisions promote but do not replace lower-level research staff. Because of these decreased staff levels, several contacts report that frontline fundraisers now submit fewer requests to research and analytics staff.

Contacts at **Institution C** suggest that gift officers' hesitation to overburden research offices' limited staff works against those offices' interests because administrators can advocate more persuasively for additional researchers when areas of weakness become evident. If gift officers request but cannot receive requested research or new prospect pools, development leadership can clearly recognize the consequences of low staff levels.

Research and Analytics Staff Levels at Profiled Institutions[1 2]



1) The prospect research and analytics unit at **Institution E** houses technology support and budgetary functions in addition to research and analytics functions, which explains in part why their staff figure is much higher than that of other profiled offices.
2) The development division at **Institution A** also utilizes an independent institutional business intelligence unit for certain data and statistical functions. Contacts did not disclose staffing figures for that unit.

Most Research and Analytics Offices Share Limited or No Space with Frontline Fundraisers

Previous Education Advisory Board research suggests that housing research staff and gift officers in the same building contributes significantly to fundraising strategy because the quality and amount of information shared between the two increases.[3] Despite this, the majority of profiled institutions house at most a small fraction of the entire research staff with gift officers, which creates physical barriers to communication.

At **Institution B**, the prospect research and analytics unit formerly shared space with the rest of the development division but has since moved into a separate building. Contacts report that the physical separation hinders collaboration, and administrators now encourage research and analytics staff to visit with gift officers in adjacent buildings or to make frequent trips to shared spaces like mailrooms and staff lounges.

Physical Placement of Research Offices and Development Divisions

Institution	Does Research Share Space with Frontline Fundraisers?	Is the Development Division Housed with the Institution's Other Administrative Units?
Institution A	Somewhat. The institution employs a hybrid model, but a central development services building houses almost all central staff.	Somewhat. Because the institution employs a hybrid model, individual units' development staff work on campus, but the central development services building is off campus.
Institution B	Somewhat. The development division leases adjacent buildings, and a few staff from each unit work in other buildings.	No. The entire development division is located off-campus.
Institution C	Somewhat. Research staff share space with gift officers at the central administrative office, but some researchers work remotely and some gift officers work in offices around the country.	Somewhat. The institution maintains offices across the country; the central administrative office houses the development division.
Institution D	No. Staff work in offices across the city where the institution is based.	No. Staff work in offices across the city where the institution is based.
Institution E	Not disclosed	Not disclosed

3) Severin, Alex. "Organizational Structure of Research Offices in Advancement." EAB custom report, 2013.

3) Services Offered by Research and Analytics Offices

Research Services

Biographical Briefings and Prospect Ratings and Assignments Represent Most Common Research Services

Though data analysis and predictive modeling increasingly represent development strategic priorities, many fundraisers still rely on basic biographical information about prospects when soliciting donations. Information about the prospect's personal and professional background, source of wealth, affiliations, other philanthropy, and network provide basic but valuable insights for gift officers. Contacts suggest that most of this information can be presented concisely in a one- to two-page brief.

Gift officers also depend on researchers to analyze and fill their prospect portfolios. Researchers assess a variety of data points about potential donors, including wealth, giving capacity, philanthropic history, and connections to the institution to assign prospects a rating. Then, teams consider gift officers' skill and experience levels, travel plans, and existing portfolio characteristics to match officers to rated prospects.

Other Essential Research Services

- **Prospect pipeline development:** Researchers gather initial information about pools of potential donors to be rated and assigned to portfolios in the future.
- **Wealth screening:** Using vendor databases, real estate and tax information, and other available data, staff evaluate prospects' capacity for giving. When offices purchase access to proprietary databases, staff spend time verifying data when necessary.
- **Network maps:** Researchers uncover connections to prospects, their families, and their professional associates to inform an outreach strategy.
- **News alerts:** Staff send news about prospects or the institution that may affect development strategy.

Contacts at **Institution A** do not contract with external vendors for wealth screening because staff have historically produced more accurate information.

Data and Analysis

Employ Data Analysis Tools that Permit Easy Data Extraction

Gift officers will more likely adopt analytics tools when those platforms allow easy access to and extraction of prospect data. Though segmentation analysis can inform strategy, gift officers must understand where to find information on individual prospects.

Frontline fundraisers' ability to navigate through analytics dashboards and portals also saves staff time spent responding to reactive requests. For this reason, analytics teams should train gift officers and their assistants on data retrieval and the usage of new tools.

Most contacts identify Tableau as their preferred platform for data analysis, modeling, and visualization. Tableau allows users to click through visualizations to a source database, so users can easily identify relevant or valuable information. Contacts also report the use of Brio and Cognos software for related analytics and modeling functions.

Database and Records Management

Profiled Research and Analytics Offices Utilize Salesforce and PeopleSoft CRM Tools for Records Management

Reactive data requests from gift officers to research and analytics offices frequently fall in one of two categories: corrections to erroneous and missing information or retrievals of details about prospects' background or wealth indicators. Active database management and prospect ratings can eliminate these reactive requests because staff can correct listings and identify promising prospects before gift officers need the information. Databases often include strategic information about active or potential prospects, donor records, alumni records, and information about current students' families. The latter three categories can help researchers identify more prospects to add to the development division's pipeline.

Contacts at profiled institutions identify PeopleSoft and Salesforce as the primary CRM technologies used for recordkeeping and relationship management.

4) Strategies for Relationship Development

Initial Steps

Conduct Informational Interviews with Gift Officers and Development Leadership when Considering New Initiatives

Research and analytics offices tend to be new, with many established in the last five to 10 years. Contacts who founded or built out their research and analytics offices recommend setting a foundation for relationship-building through frequent meetings with development leadership and gift officers early on in their tenure. These informational interviews produce feedback on the state of research and analytics functions and insights into gift officers' needs and preferences. In the short term, research and analytics staff can immediately translate information gleaned from interviews into product improvements. In the long term, this proactive outreach eases communication between offices in the development division and contributes to a research and analytics office's reputation for service and responsiveness.

Develop an Identity for Research and Analytics Offices to Guide Work and Strengthen Office Reputation

To clarify research and analytics' offices' purpose and value both internally and externally, contacts suggest a formal process to establish the office's identity. This process presents the most value for new offices or programs, but offices without a clear identity or reputation can benefit as well. With an established identity, researchers and analysts better understand the value of their own work in and value proposition to frontline fundraisers, while gift officers and other development staff recognize the unit's value and utility.

The research and analytics office at **Institution E** has demonstrated success in developing an identity that other units in the development division respect as useful and credible. As internal prestige increased through high-quality and timely service, office staff then challenged themselves to provide more innovative, proactive services for frontline fundraisers.

Key Questions in the Research and Analytics Identity Development Process at *Institution E*

1

Recognize Core Values and Goals

- What is the mission or purpose of this office?
- To what goals does this office aspire?
- What core values guide this office's work?

2

Align Office Values with Division Goals and Values

- How can this office help the development division reach its goals?
- What principles and values does this office have in common with the rest of the development division?

3

Build Credibility

- How well does this office deliver on its goals and its values?
- How strong is this office's relationship with other units?
- How can this office's relationship with other units improve?

4

Provide New Services and Insights for Development Colleagues

- What tasks or projects will fulfill this office's staff the most?
- What can this office do to improve gift officers' work day-to-day?
- How can this office contribute to the development division's long-term strategy?

Outreach Tactics

Identify Allies at All Levels of the Development Division to Promote Research and Analytics Tools

Staff in research and analytics offices deliberately seek partners throughout the development division to serve as ambassadors for research and analytics services. Though few frontline fundraisers typically express interest in research and data, staff welcome input from gift officers with some knowledge or background in those areas when developing new tools or processes. These individuals can offer insights about what features or information would be most helpful to other gift officers in the development stage and can persuade peers to adopt new products. At **Institution E**, staff also train fundraisers' assistants to use their tools to find valuable information for gift officers. This method allows research and analytics office staff to avoid any possible perception that they impose new methods on the frontline fundraising staff.

Top-Down and Bottom-Up Methods to Influence Gift Officer Use of Research and Analytics Tools

Set Expectations for Regular Contact between Frontline Fundraisers and Research and Analytics Staff

In both liaison and non-liaison models, administrators encourage staff to meet regularly with gift officers to discuss current needs and seek feedback on products. Contacts frequently cite portfolio management as a primary reason for meeting, as gift officers, researchers, and analysts can share updates on prospects. At **Institution B**, these meetings occur monthly, while at **Institution D**, meetings occur between three and five times per year.

In addition to setting formal norms for meetings between fundraisers and research and analytics staff, administrators can also train staff on relationship building techniques and encourage additional check-ins or informal interactions. Contacts at **Institution D** emphasize the value of lunches, happy hours, and other social events to develop personal bonds.

Develop New Products and Services with Client Utility in Mind

Contacts suggest that research and analytics offices possess different values than do frontline fundraisers. Research staff tend to emphasize depth and quality of information, while their counterparts in analytics offices prioritize segments and trends. In contrast, contacts describe gift officers as focused on concise, usable information about individual prospects. Research and analytics staff should factor gift officers' tendencies into the development of new products to demonstrate how fundraisers can use tools or information to identify prospects, prepare for meetings, and solicit gifts.

Changing Format and Messaging

Research Tool or Service	*Deliverable for Gift Officer*
Ten to fifteen-page brief with extensive background information about a prospect	Condensed, two page brief with essential information about the prospect's source of wealth, affiliations and related philanthropy, and network or relationships to the organization
Segmentation analysis to identify categories of likely donor types	Brief or presentation containing examples of donors within each segment, along with brief explanations of what factors make them likely donors

Feedback and Evaluation

Solicit Feedback to Improve Products and Services for Gift Officer Clients

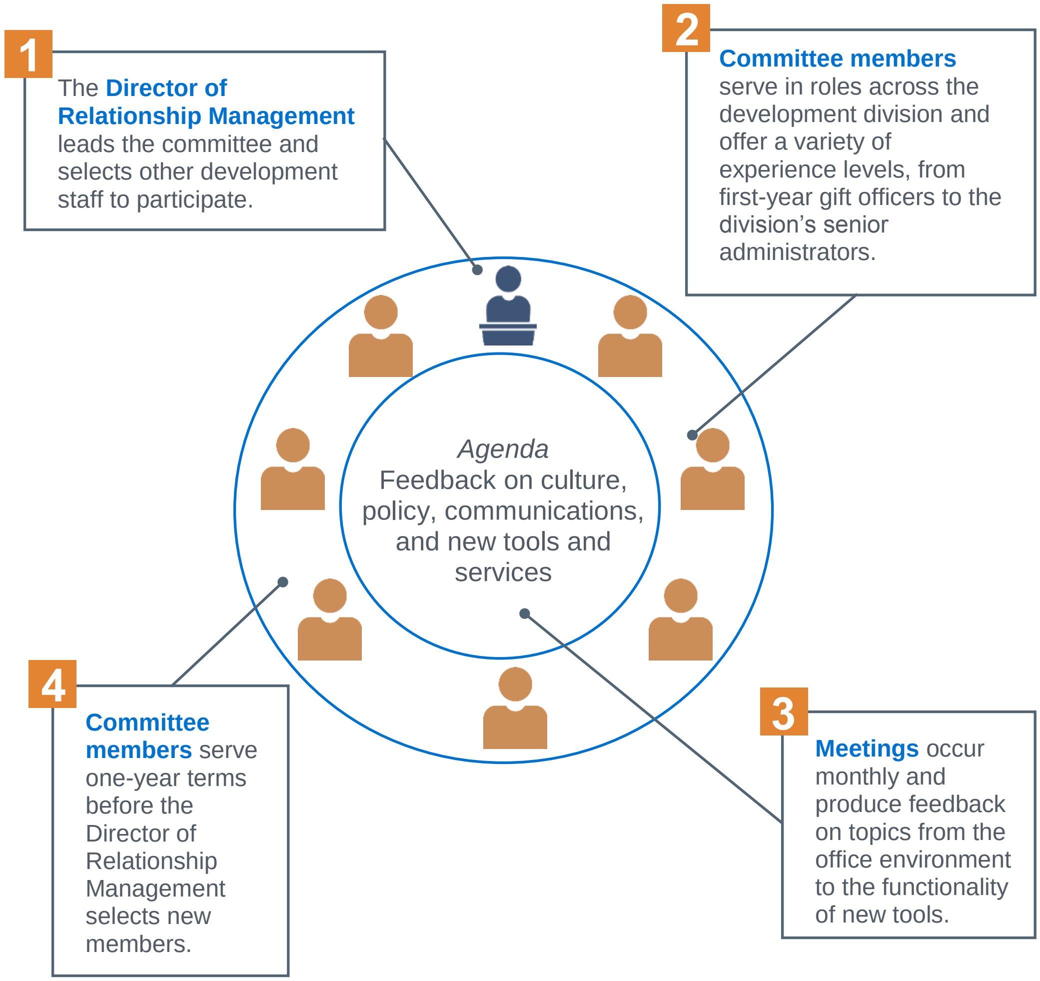
While all research and analytics administrators welcome gift officer feedback, contacts agree that frontline fundraisers infrequently show desire to participate in the creation or adjustment of tools and processes from the research and analytics office. In some cases, this requires research and analytics offices to pilot new tools with limited gift officer input and collect feedback after the fact. At **Institution C**, the research office regularly experiments with new formats and presentations for deliverables that better isolate the information that gift officers need. Thought contacts at Institution C acknowledge that gift officers and senior leaders sometimes criticize the work, the office eagerly incorporates feedback into future products.

Employ Qualitative Methods to Evaluate Offices from Gift Officers' Perspective

Research and analytics administrators often struggle to evaluate the success of their offices with quantitative metrics tied to gift officer performance. **Institution C** maintains a database that tracks when the research team recommends a prospect to a gift officer, which allows administrators to know how many prospect suggestions result in donations. Beyond that, administrators rarely attempt to draw a direct line from research or analytics activity to a successful solicitation.

Instead, research and analytics offices depend on qualitative feedback about their products and services. Contacts identify surveys, focus groups, and anecdotal information as common channels for collecting gift officers' critiques of research and analytics work, particularly for new products and services. Research and analytics administrators at **Institution D** have also established a formal committee composed of other development staff to discuss the office's work.

Relationship Management Advisory Committee at *Institution D*



Consider Process-Based Metrics and Personnel Evaluations for Internal Office Assessment

Research and analytics unit administrators typically lack clear quantitative metrics for internal evaluation of office performance. At **Institution B**, a Microsoft Access database includes records for every action performed by the research division, but because the value of each action differs (e.g., one news alert creates less impact than a report for the institution's president), this information indicates little about the office's overall performance.

Offices instead prefer metrics based on process. Frequently, these process-based evaluations consider time as a major factor (e.g., whether developers met a timeline for a new product, average time to fulfill research requests). Offices also consider financial and staff resources invested in new products against the product's functional value to determine ROI.

Personnel evaluations also represent an important component of internal office evaluations. Individual staff members' ability to perform work functions, demonstration of interpersonal skills, and knowledge of the development operation all contribute to the office's overall relationship with the rest of the division.

Research and Analytics Personnel Evaluation Criteria at *Institution A*

Research Fundamentals:
Proficiency in gathering, analyzing, and presenting information

Strategy Support:
Ability to apply prospect data to strategy for gift solicitation

Outreach and Consultancy:
Service to colleagues in other division offices

Prospect Identification:
Skill in using data and research tools to identify potential donors

Database Entry and Retrieval:
Familiarity with the office's database technologies

5) Research Methodology

Project Challenge

Leadership at a member institution approached the Forum with the following questions:

- What types of products or collateral do research and analytics offices provide for frontline development staff?
- Which products or processes do research and analytics offices consider to be proactive services? Which do offices consider to be reactive services, based on development staff requests?
- How actively do frontline fundraising staff participate in the development of new types of research and analytics collateral?
- Where does the research and analytics office reside on the organizational chart for the development division or the institution itself?
- How closely does the research and analytics office work with frontline development staff? How does this partnership function on a day-to-day basis?
- How does the institution physically situate the research and analytics office and the rest of the development team?
- How do frontline fundraisers register feedback about the work of the research and analytics office? How does the research and analytics staff employ this feedback as they create and revise collateral?
- How does development leadership evaluate the performance of the research and analytics office?

Project Sources

The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:

- EAB's internal and online research libraries (eab.com)
  - Severin, Alex. "Organizational Structure of Research Offices in Advancement." 2013.
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (http://nces.ed.gov)

Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed the directors of research and analytics for development offices at institutions that depend heavily on major or principal giving.

A Guide to Institutions Profiled in this Brief

Institution	Location	Approximate Institutional Enrollment (Undergraduate/Total)	Classification
Institution A	Northeast	14,000/21,000	Doctoral/Research Universities-Extensive
Institution B	South	6,500/14,500	Doctoral/Research Universities-Extensive
Institution C	Northeast	N/a	Nonprofit
Institution D	Mid-Atlantic	6,000/15,000	Doctoral/Research Universities-Extensive

Institution E	Mid-Atlantic	5,500/8,000	Doctoral/Research Universities-Extensive