



EAB

RESEARCH BRIEF

Structure and Staffing of Gift Planning Offices

At Small-to Mid-Sized Research Institutions

Advancement Forum

Rebecca Stefaniak

Research Associate

Anna Krenkel

Senior Research Manager

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1) Executive Overview

Key Observations

The number of gift planning staff ranges from one to eight at contact institutions, but four of five profiled offices include an executive director and/or director and at least one associate director. Often the distinction between an executive director and director corresponds with an individual's seniority and salary range rather than a difference in responsibilities. Gift planning offices at **Institution B**, **Institution C**, and **Institution D** also employ an administrative associate who supports the executive director. Gift planning offices at **Institution B** and **Institution C** include managers who facilitate the relationship between trusts and estates. At other institutions, the general counsel, comptroller, or finance department absorbs these responsibilities.

Gift planning leaders prioritize candidates' experience over advanced degrees and credentials, and they seek out certain "soft skills" required for successful gift planning work. Contacts advise seeking out three to five years of gift planning experience among candidates for associate director positions, and five to ten years among candidates for director or executive director roles. Some offices hire associate directors without specific gift planning experience if they have worked in other areas of university development, such as major gifts, annual giving, or leadership giving. Soft skills that often indicate that a candidate will be successful in gift planning work include strong listening skills, empathy, trustworthiness, and the ability to clearly explain complex topics.

At most institutions, all gift planning staff report to a director or executive director who then reports to a vice president for development. Gift planning is typically only located within the central development office, but staff assist and advise school-specific development officers on gift planning matters as needed.

The most common services gift planning offices provide include bequests, life income gifts, and assistance with gift agreements. Bequests include gifts of cash, real estate, and physical objects. Gift planning staff conduct personal meetings with donors to provide advice on gift options and help to prepare gift agreements. Gift planning staff also assist their colleagues in other areas of development (e.g., major gifts, annual giving, leadership giving) on matters related to gift planning by joining calls, going on joint visits with donors, and leading presentations to teach colleagues basic gift planning concepts so that they can reference these while speaking with donors. Less-common gift planning office services include donor advised funds and estate and trust relationship management.

Gift planning performance metrics include fundraising goals and number of visits with donors. Some offices evaluate performance on an individual basis (e.g., setting a fundraising dollar goal for each staff member), but these are typically calibrated based on position and years of experience. Other institutions only evaluate performance of the gift planning office as a whole, such as setting an annual donor visit goal. Fundraising metrics are also difficult to track in gift planning since gifts that are not a result of death are often made in conjunction with other development officers (e.g., in major gifts and leadership giving).

Benchmarking among peer institutions occurs within certain consortiums and athletic conferences. Gift planning directors at institutions within the Ivy Plus Consortium meet biannually to share fundraising results and exchange best practices, and gift planning directors at institutions within the NCAA Southeastern Conference and Atlantic Coast Conference meet annually. Some gift planning directors also have personal contacts (e.g., former colleagues or classmates) who work in gift planning at other institutions with whom they discuss performance, goals, office operations, and other gift planning topics.

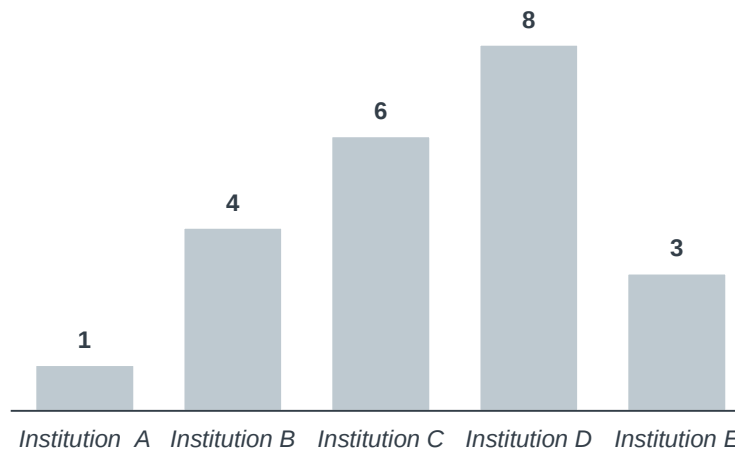
2) Organizational Structures

Roles and Responsibilities of Gift Planning Staff

Include an Executive Director, Director, and Associate Director on Gift Planning Office Staff

The number of gift planning staff members ranges from one to eight at profiled institutions, but four out of five of profiled gift planning offices employ an executive director and/or director, and at least one associate director. The exception is **Institution A**, which is staffed only by a director. However, the gift planning office at Institution A is also the smallest and newest of the profiled institutions. Since planned gifts are typically arranged later in a donor's life, institutions established more recently have a smaller donor pool interested in gift planning. Gift planning offices at **Institution B**, **Institution C**, and **Institution D** also employ an administrative associate who supports the executive director.

Number of Gift Planning Staff at Profiled Institutions



Tailor Staff Responsibilities to the Size and Function of a Gift Planning Operation

The responsibilities of individual gift planning staff members largely depends on the size of an office and the services it provides. Since gift planning offices are small compared to other areas of development, staff responsibilities often overlap or change depending on factors including personal areas of expertise and position vacancies at a given time. In addition, job titles may correspond more with an individual's seniority and salary range rather than any difference in responsibilities. For example, an executive director of gift planning may be someone who served as director for ten years and was promoted to prevent them from leaving the institution.

Division of Responsibilities in Gift Planning Offices

Position	Main Responsibilities
Executive Director	- Provides direction and leadership for gift planning staff. - Advises donors on their gift options and meets with and stewards high-profile donors. - Delivers gift planning guidance to development officers in other departments (e.g., major gifts, annual giving).
Director	- In gift planning offices without an executive director, the director performs the duties listed above. - When an executive director is present, the director focuses on meeting with donors for stewardship and gift advisement purposes.
Associate Director	Similar responsibilities as the director, but with more emphasis on fundraising and appointments with donors.
Administrative Associate	Provides administrative support to the executive director or director (e.g., scheduling appointments, coordinating travel, managing email inboxes, answering calls).

Manager Positions in Gift Planning Offices

The gift planning offices at **Institution B** and **Institution C** hire managers in addition to the positions described above, whose titles are Trusts and Estates Manager and Life Income Plan Manager, respectively. At other institutions, standard gift planning staff, the general counsel, comptroller, and/or finance department assumes responsibilities for managing trusts, estates, and life income plans.

Prioritize Candidates' Knowledge of the Gift Planning Field above Advanced Degrees and Credentials

The most common degrees and credentials among gift planning leaders are Juris Doctor, Master of Business Administration, Certified Public Accountant, and Certified Financial Planner. Contacts state that gift planning is a field in which advanced degrees and credentials are highly valued in the employment market, but are not required for a successful career in gift planning. One contact notes that hiring staff with advanced degrees and credentials can sometimes mislead donors who assume that a gift planning office is equipped to provide personal, high-level legal and financial advice.

Gift planning directors at profiled institutions emphasize that knowledge and experience working in planned giving is more valuable than broad legal or financial knowledge. In terms of years of experience in gift planning, contacts recommend seeking out the following in applicants for gift planning positions:

- Three to five years of gift planning experience for an associate director role
- Five to ten years of gift planning experience for a director or executive director role

Some offices hire associate directors without any gift planning experience if they have worked in other areas of development within the same university, such as annual giving or alumni affairs.

Consider Candidates From a Variety of Professional Backgrounds when Hiring Gift Planning Staff

Gift planning leaders share that because other industries (e.g., law, finance, accounting) may offer more competitive salaries than higher education, it can be difficult to find highly qualified and skilled individuals who also have a proclivity for gift planning work. As a result, gift planning staff possess a variety of professional backgrounds,

including estate planning law, tax law, finance, accounting, annual giving, and nonprofit development. Contacts note that individuals with a background in banking or corporate finance often apply to leadership roles in their offices. However, these applicants often fail to demonstrate the soft skills needed to work in planned giving, nor are they prepared to work in the higher education environment and become easily frustrated with its levels of bureaucracy.

Hire Individuals Who Express a Desire to Work in Gift Planning Long-Term

Employee turnover in gift planning offices is detrimental to relationships with donors since gifts take at least three to five years to develop. Contacts at **Institution D** cite ten years as the ideal time for a gift planning staff member to spend working at one institution.

When Hiring Staff, Seek out “Soft Skills” Specific to Gift Planning

Gift planning leaders at profiled institutions report that there are a number of valuable soft skills and qualities to look for in gift planning candidates that may not be as critical in other areas of development, such as annual giving, where relationships with donors are not as close or complex. Because gift planning offices are small and responsibilities often overlap between staff positions, these qualities are important to look for in all roles, not just when hiring a director or executive director.

Soft Skills Required for Success in Gift Planning Work



Gift planning staff must be **skilled listeners** to cultivate individual relationships with donors. Remembering personal facts like children’s names pleases donors and may increase their likelihood of giving.



Gift planning staff should be able to **explain complex concepts clearly and succinctly** to donors. This includes high-level financial advising and planned gift nuances, and this skill spans more than subject-matter expertise.



Gift planning staff should be **empathetic**. Reviewing gift planning options involves discussing one’s mortality, a highly-sensitive topic for most people.



Since they are privy to information about donors’ personal lives, gift planning officers must convey that they are **trustworthy**. This means always following through with requests and putting donors’ interests before the institution’s when providing gift advice.

Staff Members at Most Gift Planning Offices Report to the Director or Executive Director

The reporting structure in gift planning offices is similar across institutions due to the small number of staff members. The most senior leader within gift planning offices at profiled institutions is either a director or executive director, and the rest of the office staff (e.g., directors, associate directors, managers, administrative associates) report directly to him or her, and indirectly to their second-in-command whether that person is a director or associate director. Reporting indirectly typically involves collaborating with an individual on a specific project or campaign. The gift planning office at **Institution C** includes a Volunteer Program Manager who manages the class giving programs, but this individual works in gift planning and alumni relations and reports to supervisors in both areas.

Gift Planning Offices Typically Report to the Vice President for Development

The most common reporting structure for gift planning units at profiled institutions is for the executive director or director of gift planning to report to the vice president for development. At **Institution B**, both development (including gift planning) and alumni relations report to the Senior Vice President for University Advancement. Another consideration that impacts the reporting relationship between gift planning offices and other areas of development is whether the institution only has one central development office or has school-specific development offices. When the latter is the case, gift planning is typically located within central development but assists and advises development staff within individual schools as needed.

3) Gift Planning Services and Performance Metrics

Services Gift Planning Offices Provide

Common Services Include Managing Gifts and Advising Donors and Development Officers on Gift Planning

Gift planning offices at all contact institutions manage bequests (including cash, real estate, and physical gifts) and life income gifts. Gift planning staff aid donors in choosing their gift options and preparing gift agreements. Gift planning staff also provide advice and support to other development officers on campus. Contacts report that major gift offices tend to experience the most overlap in donors with gift planning offices, but leadership and annual giving donors utilize gift planning services as well.

Interesting Physical Gifts Bequeathed to Institutions

- Musical instruments
- Super Bowl championship rings
- Boats
- Furniture
- Stamp collections
- Rare coins

Only Two of Five Profiled Gift Planning Offices Manage Relationships between Institutions, Estates, and Trusts

Gift planning staff at **Institution B** and **Institution C** manage the relationships between the institution and estates and trusts as part of their offices' services. This involves maintaining a relationship between the institution and the grantor or executor of the trust or estate to ensure that terms are met in accordance with the will or agreement. At most institutions, these functions fall within the responsibilities of the offices of the general counsel, finance department, or comptroller. An additional gift planning service provided by **Institution B** and **Institution C** are donor advised funds. However, donor advised funds require more resources and extra training for staff members, and they are not commonplace within university gift planning offices.



What is a Donor Advised Fund?

In the context of higher education, a donor advised fund is a charitable gift fund account in which a donor deposits cash, securities, or other financial instruments (typically totaling \$250,000 or more) and receives a tax deduction for the full amount. The institution now owns everything in the account, but the donor retains advisory privileges over how their account is invested and how it distributes money to charities.

Informal Collaboration Occurs between Gift Planning and Other Areas of Development

Most gift planning leaders report that there are no formal structures in place to facilitate collaboration between offices. However, gift planning staff respond to questions from other development officers at monthly development meetings, or on an individual basis for more complex gift requests.

Ways in Which Gift Planning Staff Assist Other Development Units



Joining calls with donors



Coordinating joint visits with donors



Conducting short presentations about gift planning

Gift Planning Performance Metrics

Establish Individual and Team-Wide Performance Metrics to Measure Success of Gift Planning

Performance metrics in relation to gift planning operations vary greatly across institutions. Some gift planning offices set fundraising goals and target numbers of visits for individual staff members, and others only review these metrics in relation to the overall office. However, fundraising metrics are more difficult to measure in gift planning than in other areas of development. This is because gifts made that are not

a result of death are often coordinated through collaborated efforts between gift planning and development staff in other offices including major gifts, annual giving, and leadership giving. Additionally, because planned gifts are not realized until a donor dies, it is difficult to predict when and if funds will distribute to the institution.

Performance Goals Set by Gift Planning Offices

Institution Name	Goals for Individual Staff Members	Office-Wide Goals
Institution B	None	150 donors visits per year
Institution C	- Associate Director: 120 donor visits per year - Executive Director: 35-40 donor visits per year	Measure fundraising dollar amounts at the end of each year, but no numerical goal because the amount changes based on the economic market and the willingness of donors to make planned gifts
Institution D	120 donor visits per year - Fundraising dollar goals are graduated based on experience and level of gift officers: - Associate director: 1st year= \$500,000 2nd year=\$1,000,000 3rd year=\$3,000,000 -Director: 1st year= \$1,000,000 2nd year=\$3,000,000 3rd year=\$5,000,000	- Measure fundraising dollar amounts at the end of each year, but no numerical goal because the amount changes based on the market - Induct 10-15 new members per year into a society for donors who include the institution in their estate plans
Institution E	Fundraising dollar goals and target number of visits are graduated based on experience and level of gift officers	Measure fundraising dollar amounts at the end of each year, but no numerical goal because the amount changes based on the market

Benchmarking across institutions occurs in both formal and informal capacities. Gift planning directors at institutions within the Ivy Plus Consortium meet biannually to share fundraising results and exchange best practices, and gift planning directors at institutions within the NCAA Southeastern Conference and Atlantic Coast Conference meet annually. Some gift planning directors have personal contacts (e.g., former colleagues or classmates) who work in gift planning at other institutions with whom they discuss performance, goals, office operations, and other gift planning topics.

4) Research Methodology

Project Challenge

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

- What services do gift planning offices provide for donors?
- What responsibilities do gift planning staff members assume within the overall advancement function at profiled institutions
- How many staff members comprise the gift planning unit(s) at contact institutions, and what are the different staffing levels within gift?
- What is the reporting structure for staff members within gift planning?
- What is the size and structure of the overall advancement function at contact institutions?
- What is the reporting structure for gift planning within the overall advancement structure at contact institutions?
- What mechanisms exist to foster collaboration between gift planning staff and other development officers with the overall advancement function at contact institutions?
- What experiences or other general qualifications do gift planning staff members currently possess (e.g., corporate experience, fundraising experience, legal knowledge)? Which does the leader(s) of the gift planning team possess?
- Which additional backgrounds, experiences, or other general qualifications would gift planning staff members ideally possess? Which would the leader of a gift planning team ideally possess?
- What credentials, and/or certifications do gift planning staff members currently possess? Which does the leader(s) of a gift planning team possess?
- Which additional credentials, and/or certifications would gift planning staff members ideally possess? Which would the leader of a gift planning team ideally possess?
- Which metrics or key performance indicators are used to evaluate staff performance in the overall advancement function at contact institutions? Which are used specifically within gift planning units?
- Which metrics or key performance indicators do contacts use to assess the contribution of gift planning units to institutional advancement objectives?
- Which metrics or key performance indicators do contacts use to benchmark gift planning unit performance against those at peer institutions?

Project Sources

The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:

- EAB's internal and online research libraries (eab.com)
- The Chronicle of Higher Education (<http://chronicle.com>)

Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed directors and executive directors in planned giving offices at small-to mid-sized research universities.

A Guide to Institutions Profiled in this Brief

Institution	Location	Approximate Institutional Enrollment (2014)	Classification
Institution A	Northeast	5,800	Research Universities (very high research activity)
Institution B	Northeast	9,000	Research Universities (very high research activity)
Institution C	Northeast	6,300	Research Universities (very high research activity)
Institution D	Northeast	17,800	Research Universities (very high research activity)
Institution E	South	12,800	Research Universities (very high research activity)