



***Advancement Moving Forward:
The State of Advancement and Alumni Relations***

**Confidence, Satisfaction, Challenges, Campus Activism,
and Artificial Intelligence**

June 2024

If you have questions or comments, or suggestions for future survey topics,
please contact us at info@wash-mcg.com

BACKGROUND

The WASHBURN & McGOLDRICK June 2024 *Advancement Moving Forward* survey of advancement professionals is the eleventh in our series on the state of the profession. This series began in April 2020. Since then, we have tracked how alumni relations officers, gift officers, senior advancement staff, and chief advancement officers (CAOs) have kept the momentum of their advancement efforts moving forward.

These surveys explore timely issues of importance to advancement professionals in US universities, colleges, and independent schools. The topics in each survey are suggested by CAOs and their senior staff to provide information that allows them to respond in a timely manner.

The June 2024 survey focuses on five topics:

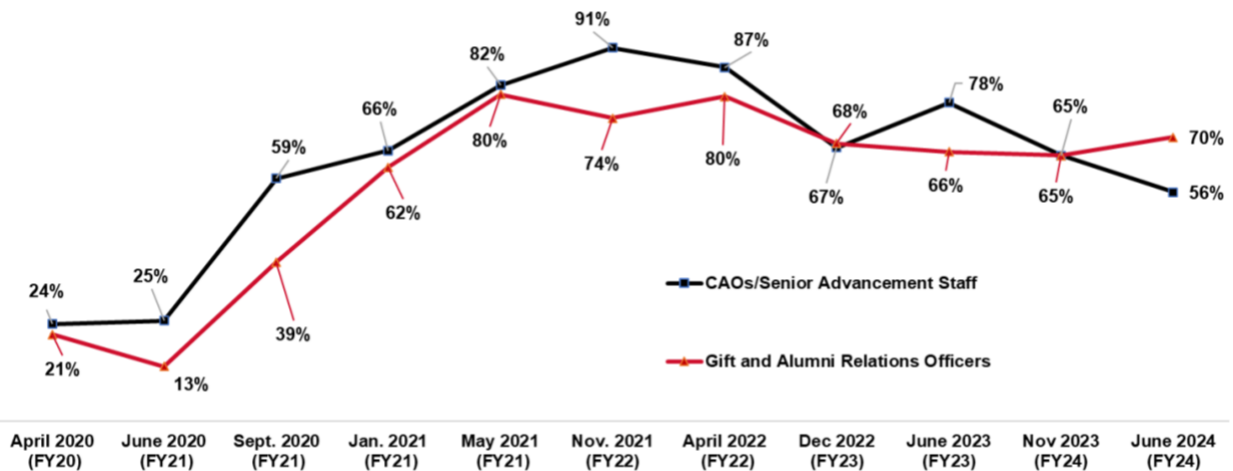
- Confidence in achieving FY24 goals,
- Job satisfaction,
- Campus activism and protests,
- Use of artificial intelligence in advancement (AI), and
- Challenges to making the case for philanthropy.

Confidence in achieving fundraising goals for each fiscal year has been explored in every survey. More, recently, we have also addressed staff turnover, fundraising priorities, the use of technology to engage donors and alumni, videoconference fatigue, and institutional responses to DEIB issues. Many of our changes to the question these reflect a stabilization of certain issues related to the pandemic, and we feel this is an opportunity to address other current and pressing issues. A full list of topics appears in the methodology section of this report.

The June 2024 survey was conducted in May and June 2024. Responses were received by 257 individuals from 111 colleges, universities, independent schools, and museums. These include two Historically Black Colleges and Universities and four Hispanic-Serving Institutions. Details about the methodology and a list of participating institutions can be found at the end of this report.

MAJOR FINDING: CONFIDENCE IN MEETING GOALS HAS DECLINED AMONG SENIOR ADVANCEMENT LEADERS OVER THE LAST YEAR

**Confidence that Institution Will Reach Fundraising Goals
(% answering confident)**

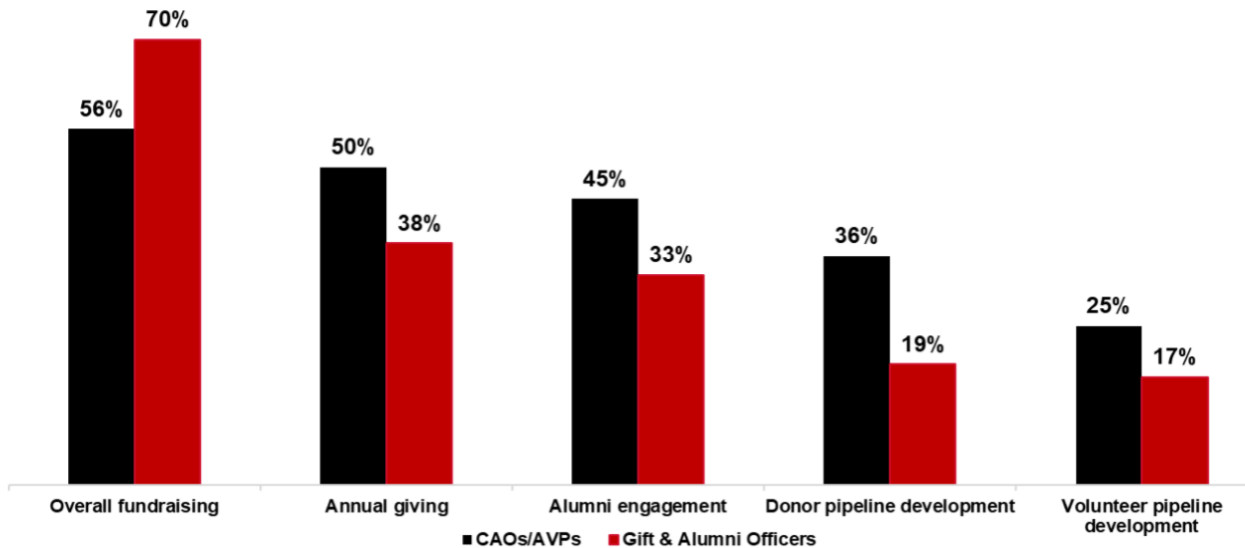


- WASHBURN & McGOLDRICK’s *Advancement Moving Forward* survey reveals that among CAOs/AVPs, those confident in reaching their fundraising goal has **fallen markedly over the last year, from 78% in June 2023 to 56% in June 2024**.
- This level of confidence represents a significant decline from its peak number of 91%, in November 2021. In fact, this share of CAOs/AVPs lacking confidence in meeting their goals is the lowest recorded in the survey since June 2020 when pandemic-related challenges and uncertainty decimated confidence.
- Despite this decline among CAOs/AVPs, **the percent of gift and alumni relations officers expressing confidence in reaching their goals actually increased over the last six months to 70%, a full 14% ahead of CAOs/AVPs**. Gift and alumni officers have only shown higher levels of confidence once (December 2022, by one percentage point). While the gap is the most significant recorded, it has not been unusual for the two groups to trend in opposite directions (May 2021 to November 2021, November 2021 to April 2022, December 2022 to June 2023, June 2023 to June 2024).

BEHIND THE NUMBERS

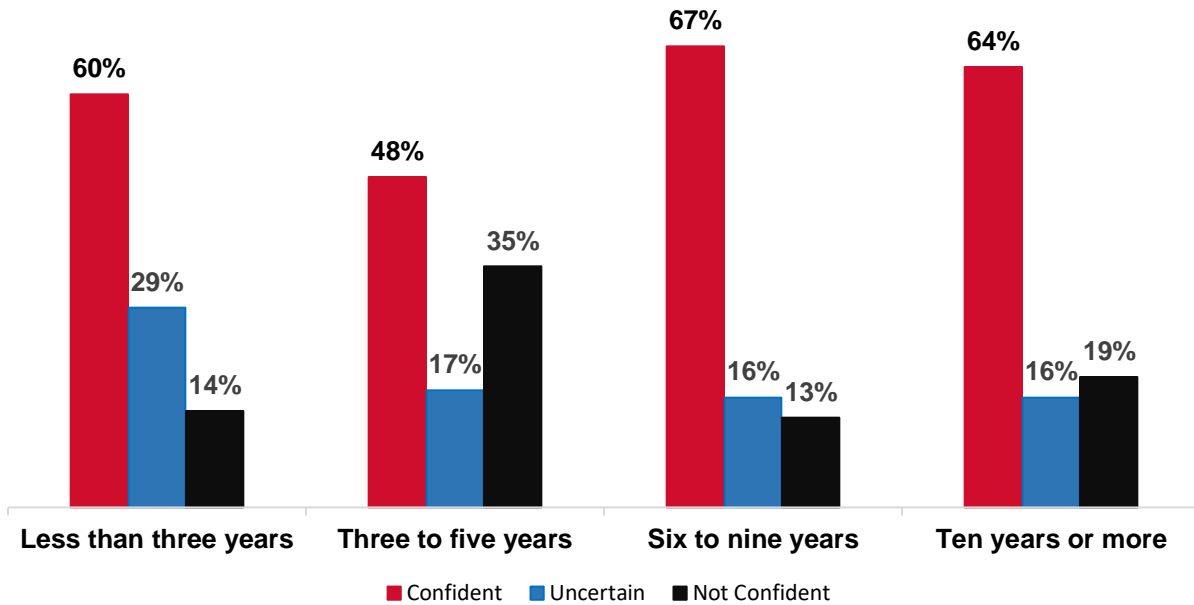
The June 2024 *Advancement Moving Forward* survey explored four additional attributes of confidence that provide insight into differences between CAOs/AVPs, gift and alumni officers. Specifically, respondents were asked about their confidence in meeting targets in four key areas—alumni engagement, annual giving, donor pipeline, and volunteer pipeline goals.

Confidence in Meeting Key Advancement Goals (% confident)



- The results reveal that there is some **underlying confidence in alumni engagement and giving**, but uncertainty or a lack of confidence in donor and volunteer pipeline development.
- CAOs/AVPs are more likely to express confidence in these four additional areas than their staff, though nevertheless most still express a lack of confidence. The data do not point to a clear explanation but rather a need for future research to address why staff are less confident in these areas and why very significant numbers of staff lack confidence in their pipeline-building programs while so many of them are confident that their institutions will meet their fundraising targets.
- **The data indicate that advancement staff are more confident about current outcomes (giving and engagement) and lack confidence about building toward the future (pipelines).**

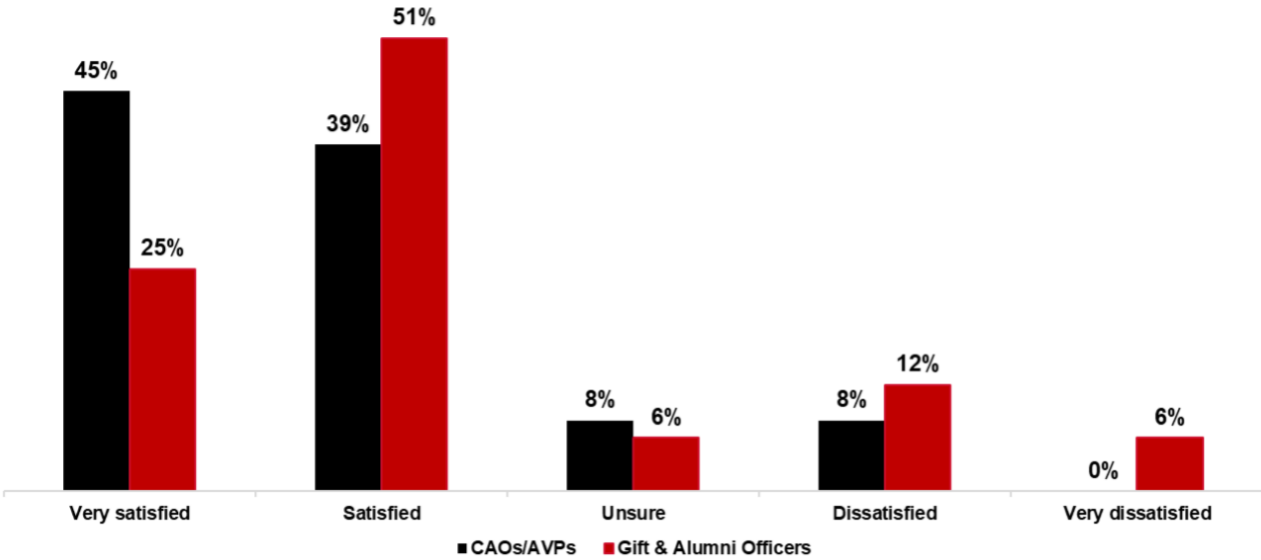
Confidence That Institution Will Meet Fundraising Goals By Years of Advancement Experience



- **Confidence in meeting fundraising goals does not vary much by years working in advancement—with one notable exception.** Respondents with three to five years of advancement experience are roughly twice as likely to be not confident and are the only cohort where fewer than half express confidence.

MAJOR FINDING: JOB SATISFACTION IS HIGH AND CONSIDERABLY HIGHER THAN THAT OF AMERICAN WORKERS AS A WHOLE

Level of Job Satisfaction by Role



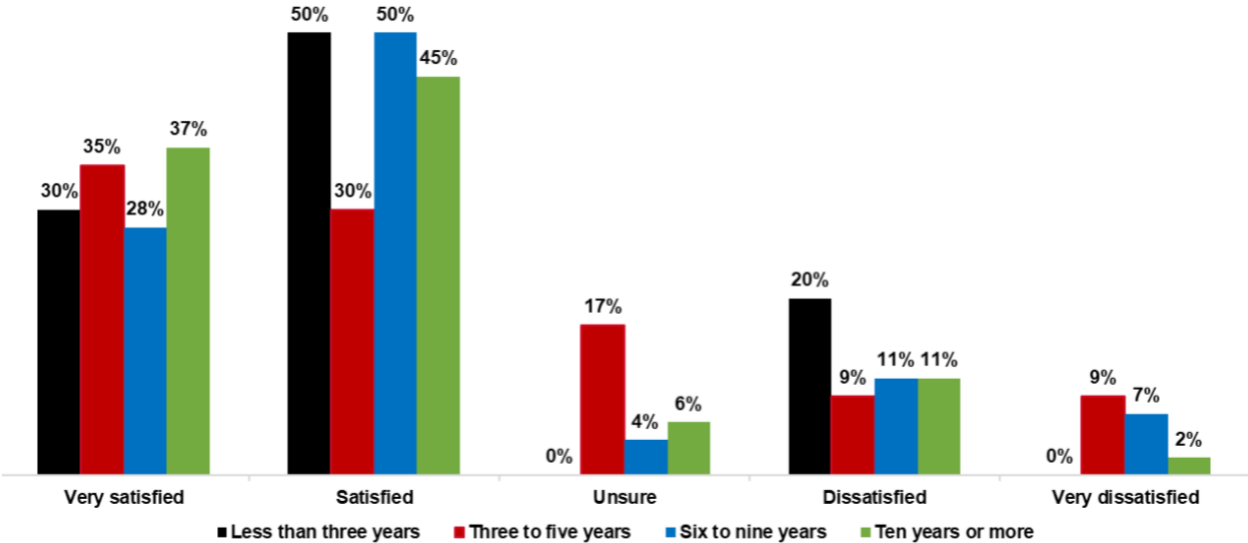
- **The data indicate that a large majority of advancement leadership and gift/alumni officers are satisfied with their jobs.** Eighty-four percent (of CAOs/AVPs and 76% of gift and alumni officers answered that they were very satisfied or satisfied.
- Looking at the more granular data, CAOs/AVPs are nearly twice as likely to report being very satisfied as opposed to simply satisfied compared to gift/alumni officers.
- A 2023 Pew survey found that 51% of American workers were satisfied with their jobs¹. A 2022 survey by the Conference Board found 62% were satisfied². Both asked the question in slightly different forms from each other and from this survey. Nevertheless, **it appears that American advancement workers report considerably more job satisfaction than workers in other sectors.**

¹ *How Americans View Their Jobs*. Published by Pew Research Center (2023). <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2023/03/30/how-americans-view-their-jobs/>

² *Job Satisfaction 2023*. Published by The Conference Board (2023). <https://www.conference-board.org/pdfdownload.cfm?masterProductID=46114>

MAJOR FINDING: LONGER TENURE IN ADVANCEMENT IS CONNECTED TO HIGHER LEVELS OF JOB SATISFACTION

Job Satisfaction by Years in Advancement



- The survey results show that longer tenure is correlated with higher job satisfaction. Eighty-two percent of respondents with 10 or more years in Advancement report they are satisfied or very satisfied and 78% with six to nine years in Advancement feel the same way.
- Eighty percent (80%) of the newest members of the profession report satisfaction.
- Respondents with **three to five years of experience are less likely to be satisfied** by a considerable margin (65% reporting satisfied or very satisfied). They are much more likely to answer unsure, and somewhat more likely to answer very dissatisfied (9%). These results are consistent with results earlier in this report that found that respondents in this category of tenure are considerably less likely to have confidence in their institution meeting its goals.

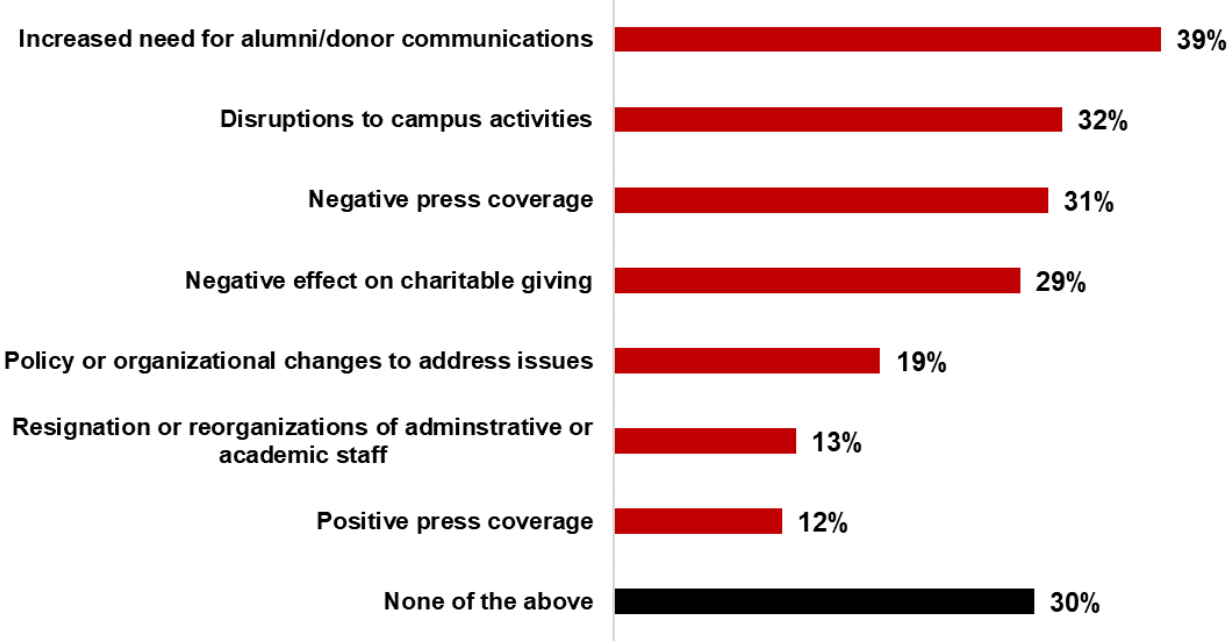
Level of Confidence in Reaching Goals by Job Satisfaction

	Confident	Uncertain	Not confident
Satisfied	68%	18%	14%
Unsure	47%	12%	41%
Dissatisfied	53%	9%	38%

- The survey data show **meaningful relationship between confidence in reaching fundraising goals and job satisfaction**. Of those reporting higher job satisfaction, 68% are confident that they will reach their goals. Of those feeling dissatisfaction, 53% report high confidence.
- These data are starker when looking at those who are not confident: only 14% of the satisfied are not confident, and **38% of the dissatisfied report feeling not confident**.

MAJOR FINDING: INSTITUTIONS ARE STEPPING UP COMMUNICATIONS AND EXPERIENCING CAMPUS DISRUPTIONS DUE TO RECENT ACTIVISM

Share of Respondents Reporting Impacts from Campus Activism and Protests



- The WASHBURN & MCGOLDRICK June 2024 *Advancement Moving Forward* survey found that **70% of respondents are experiencing at least some effects from recent campus activism and/or protests**. The question was not limited to the effects listed above, but it did specifically offer diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and the Middle East as examples.
- The most commonly reported effects are an increased need for alumni/donor communications (39%), disruptions to campus activities (32%), and negative press coverage (31%).
- A **negative effect on charitable giving was reported by 29%** of respondents.

VERBATIM COMMENTS: How else has your advancement or alumni program been affected?

“Additional staff time has been needed to respond to donor concerns. Gifts have been put on hold or withdrawn. Some alums have opted not to attend Reunion because of how they perceive the college is handling the situation.”

“The focus, energy, resources required to address the activism/protests is significant and draining on morale, budgets, attention of senior leadership.”

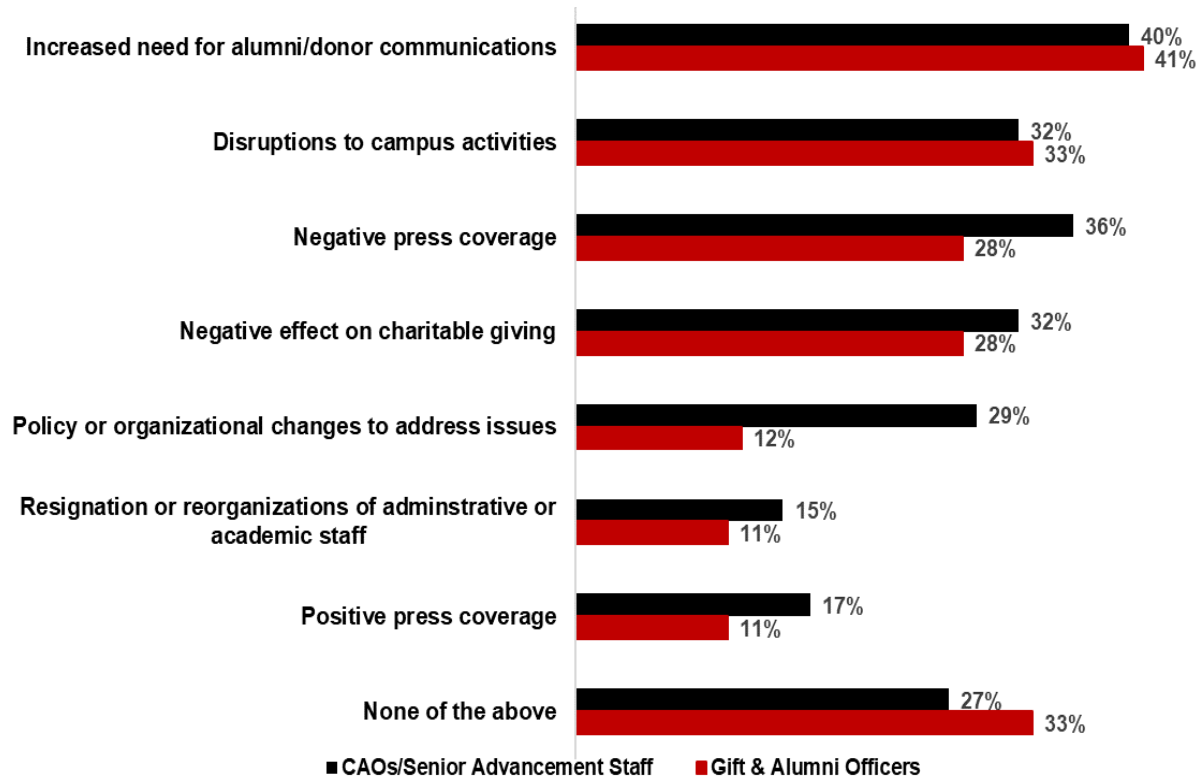
“We haven’t - thank goodness!”

“Our alumni donors are interested in knowing how the Israeli/Hamas/Gaza situation is showing up in campus life. We have not had protests or any type of campus unrest. Our alumni donors seem content with the updates we provide in our meetings with them.”

“Reduction of certain appeals due to negative responses. Some stress on individual members of advancement, but generally ok. We have rallied as an office and have a united front.”

“It doesn’t appear as though we have been affected.”

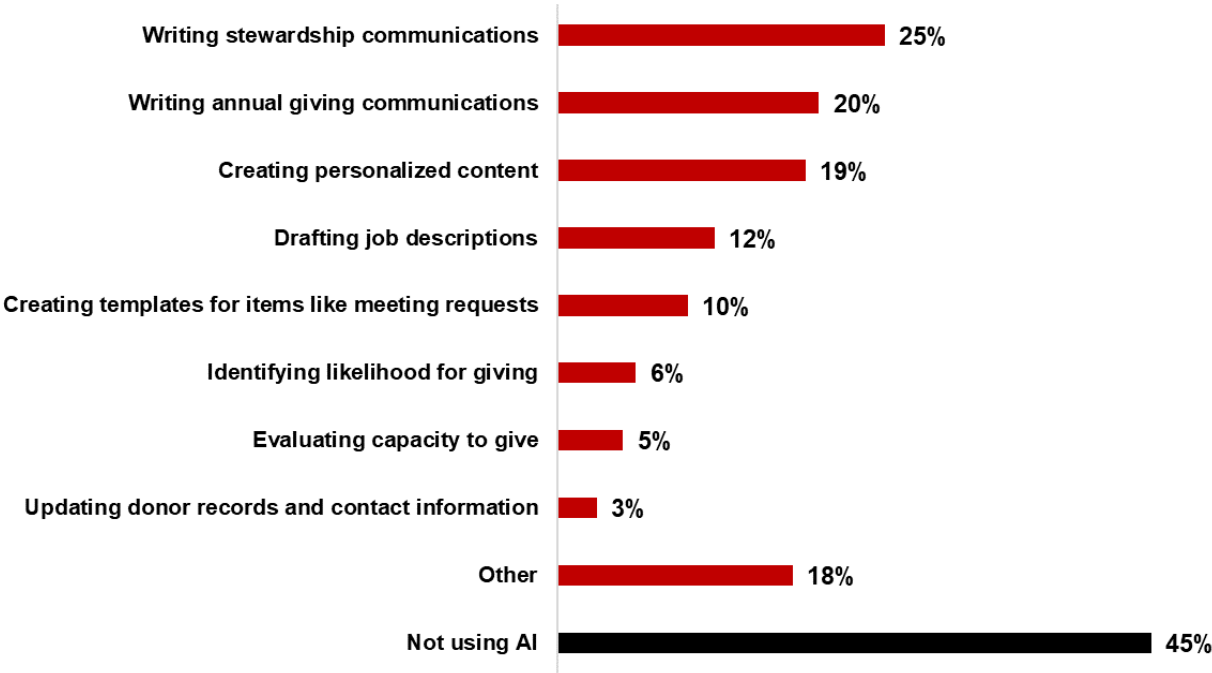
Share of Respondents Reporting Types of Effects from Campus Activism and Protests by Role



- **The survey found very little difference between advancement leadership and other staff on nearly every topic**, suggesting that people throughout advancement are witnessing or having similar experiences.
- The one significant exception is policy or organizational changes to address campus activism and protests. CAOs/AVPs, at 29%, are twice as likely as other staff (12%) to report this as an effect. It may reflect that senior staff are more likely to be aware of broader institutional policy changes than gift and alumni officers.

**MAJOR FINDING: MANY IN ADVANCEMENT ARE USING AI,
PRIMARILY FOR WRITING**

**Uses of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Fundraising
and Alumni Engagement**



- The June 2024 WASHBURN & McGOLDRICK *Advancement Moving Forward* survey found that **55% of respondents are using artificial intelligence (AI)** as part of their work. Forty-five percent answer that they are not using AI in their work.
- The question did not distinguish between “official” policy for using AI in specific situations, so some reported use may be happening at the level of the individual staff member.
- Of the eight options that could be chosen, the **top five were related to writing**. Tasks requiring a certain level of analysis or data evaluation were all among the three least-selected options with single-digit percentages selecting them.

VERBATIM COMMENTS: Please describe more about the ways you use, or would like to use, AI?

“We are discouraged from using AI.”

“I would like to see using AI to better segment constituencies for custom outreach.”

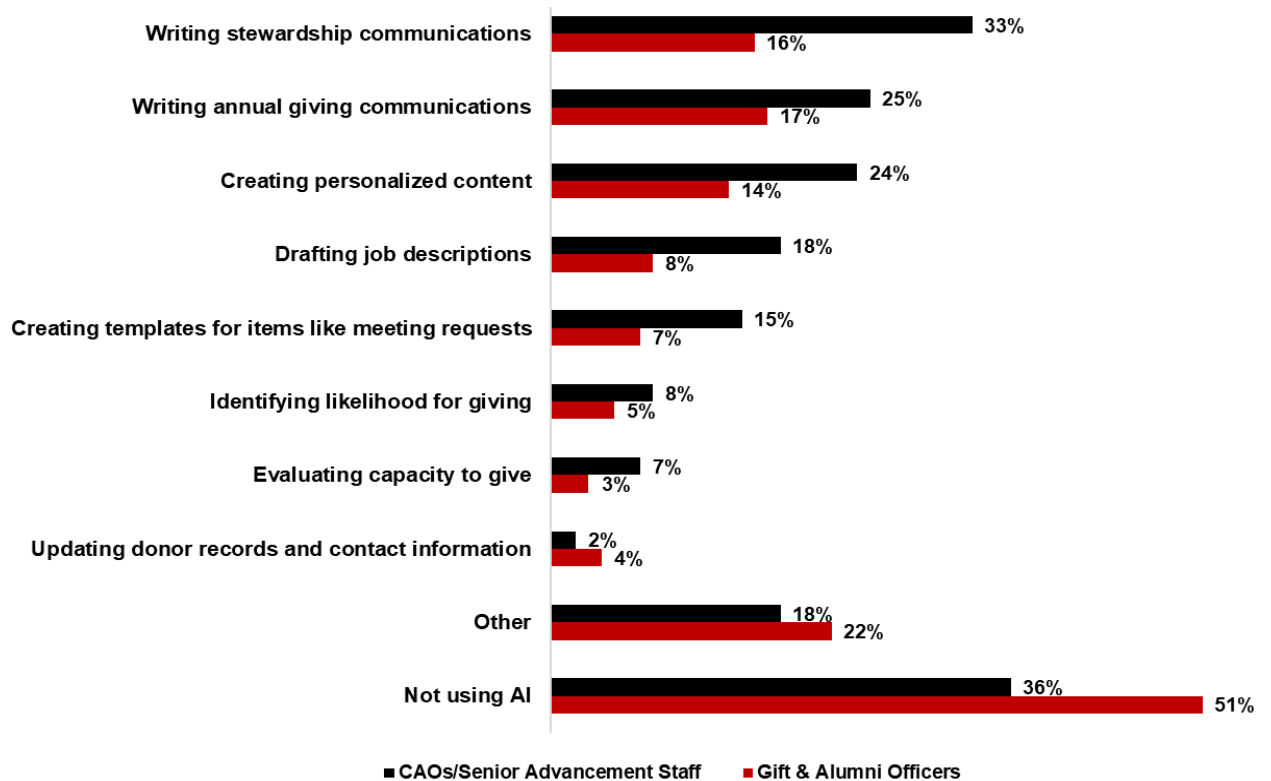
“Creating grant application and grant report templates. Summarizing massive call reports, massive grant application requirements, etc.”

“These fall under efficiency: - Organizing, summarizing and re-articulating a unified set of standard operating procedures for the Advancement Division. - Trip planning and meeting requests that analyze the MGOs calendar, to include creating draft emails with calendaring options for the MGO to send to prospects.”

“In a dream scenario I would have an AI Assistant who does all of my visit outreach on my behalf.”

“We are not even focused on AI, which in my view is a bit of a mistake.”

Uses of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Fundraising and Alumni Engagement by Role



- The survey found **notable differences between CAOs/AVPs and other staff in their use of AI**. Senior staff are more likely to report use of AI in all but one category (updating donor records and contact information), typically by a margin of 10 points or more.
- Thirty-six percent of CAOs/AVPs say they do not use AI, compared to 51% of gift and alumni officers.

VERBATIM COMMENTS: What reservations do you have about using AI at your institution?

“It needs to be reviewed and edited and not blindly used.”

“I’m unclear about AI’s potential impact on higher ed Advancement but have reservations about maintaining personal relationships with donors if AI results in fewer frontline professionals.”

“Research indicates that there are a lot biases with AI. Not sure if that is something I am comfortable using.”

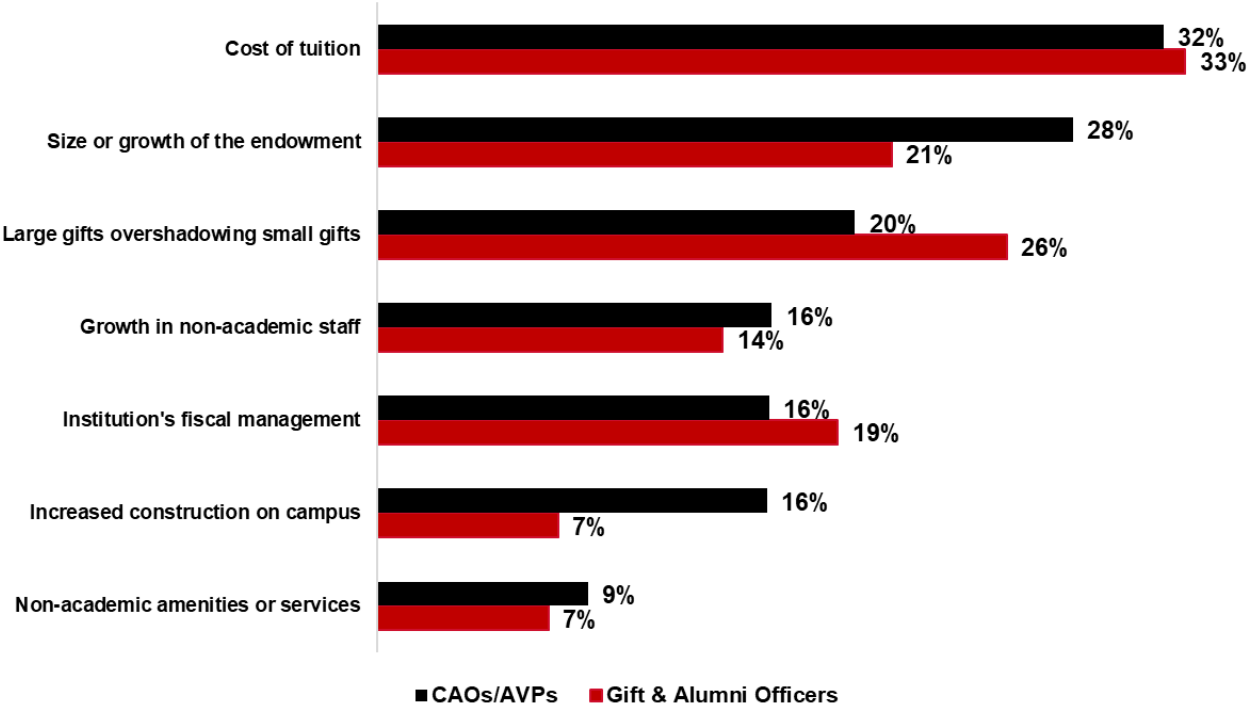
“Data integrity, data sharing, obviously plagiarism and other unethical uses.”

“AI, especially ChatGPT language is very generic and stiff. While it is helpful in providing a first draft, it requires a human touch to finetune and personalize for the institution or author.”

“I don't really. It is here to stay so we better figure out how to use it and develop a policy towards using it. That is my opinion anyway. It reminds me of the early days of the internet...everyone was scared to death of it, but look at how it has simplified and also complicated things all at once. AI will be the same, but it isn't going anywhere.”

**MAJOR FINDING: TUITION COST AND SIZE OF ENDOWMENT
CITED AS MOST SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES IN MAKING THE
CASE TO GIVE**

**Factors in Making the Case to Give More Difficult
(Percent answering difficult or very difficult)**



- **The cost of tuition is cited most frequently as the factor making the case to give more difficult** by both CAOs/AVPs (32%) and gift and alumni officers (33%). Size of the endowment is also commonly cited, as is large gifts overshadowing small gifts.
- Overall, none of these factors was cited by a majority of respondents as making the case to give more difficult.

METHODOLOGY

- The **June 2024** survey was sent in May and June 2024 to 5,436 CAOs, Vice Presidents for advancement, AVPs, Directors of development, gift officers (school/center-based, central, and regional), alumni engagement officers, and alumni relations officers at universities, colleges, museums, and independent schools throughout the US. The survey closed on June 12, 2024.
- **The survey took five minutes to complete**, with a 94% completion rate. This includes responses to two open-ended questions.
- **Responses to the June 2024 survey were received from 257** individuals (100 CAOs/senior advancement staff, 91 gift officers, 23 alumni relations officers, 25 “other,” and 18 advancement services staff), **representing 111 institutions**. Responses were received from five independent schools, two HBCUs, four HSIs, and one museum.
- **Topics April 2020 to June 2024:**

	April 2020	June 2020	Sept 2020	Jan 2021	May 2021	Nov 2021	April 2022	Dec 2022	June 2023	Nov 2023	June 2024
Confidence	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Office, hybrid, and remote work		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Alumni engagement							x	x	x	x	
Advancement/Alumni Relations integration										x	
Future challenges	x		x	x		x	x	x	x	x	
Using technology to engage donors			x			x	x	x	x		
Staff productivity						x		x			
Staffing vacancies						x	x				
Adjusting to remote/hybrid work	x	x				x					
Fundraising priorities		x	x	x	x						
Impact of the pandemic on advancement		x	x	x	x						
“Zoom” fatigue			x	x							
DEIB					x				x		
Job satisfaction											x
Campus activism											x
Artificial intelligence											x
Making the case to give											x

Margin of error: While response rates are frequently cited as a measure of a survey's "success," the margin of error is the more important statistic. **It is a measure of the accuracy of the results.**

- The margin of error for the June 2024 survey is +/- 6.0% at a 95% confidence level. This suggests that we are 95% certain that results of this *Advancement Moving Forward* survey are within 6.0% of the results we would have observed if we had responses from all 5,436 individuals who were sent the survey. The acceptable margin of error used by most surveys is typically between 4% and 8% at the 95% confidence level.

Results of all the surveys are available at <https://www.wash-mcg.com>

PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS

Adams State College	Smith College
American Jewish University	Smithsonian
Appalachian State University	Southwestern University
Ball State University	Springfield College (MA)
Brewster Academy *	St. John Fisher College
Bucknell University	St. Lawrence University
Carnegie Mellon University	St. Olaf College
Carroll University (WI)	SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry
Central Methodist University	Suffolk University
College of Wooster	SUNY Potsdam
Colorado College	Swarthmore College
Connecticut College	Syracuse University
Davidson College	Texas Christian University
Denison University	Texas Southern University
Dickinson College	Texas Tech University
Drexel University	The Catholic University of America
Duke University	Towson University
Elon University	Trinity College (CT)
Fairfield College Preparatory School *	Tulane University
Fairfield University	Union College
Franklin & Marshall College	University of Arizona
Furman University	University of California - Santa Barbara
George Washington University	University of Chicago Booth School of Business
Georgia Tech	University of Delaware
Gettysburg College	University of Houston
Grinnell College	University of Louisville
Hampton University	University of Maryland - Baltimore County
Haverford College	University of Maryland - College Park
High Point University	University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science
Illinois Institute of Technology	University of Missouri System
Immaculata University	University of New Hampshire
Jackson State University	University of North Carolina - Asheville
James Madison University	University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill
Kingswood Oxford School*	University of Pittsburgh
Knox College	University of Rhode Island
Lafayette College	University of Richmond
Le Moyne College	University of South Carolina
Lincoln University	University of Texas El Paso
Macalester College	Vanderbilt University
McDaniel College	Vassar College
Michigan State University	Virginia Commonwealth University
Mount Holyoke College	Virginia Tech University
North Carolina School of Science and Math	Washington and Lee University

North Carolina State University
Oberlin College and Conservatory
Ohio State University
Ohio University
Plymouth State University
Providence College
Rollins College
Rutgers - The State University of New Jersey
Saint Anselm College
Siena College
Skidmore College

Washington University - Saint Louis
Wesleyan University
Western Michigan University
Wheaton College (MA)
Whitman College
William & Mary
Williams College
Woodberry Forest School *

** Independent school*