Table of Contents

A Window into Independent School Fundraising Practices

As a firm that works with more than 200 primary and secondary schools each year, CCS Fundraising is committed to helping Independent Schools maximize their development efforts. We are pleased to present our latest resource for Independent School fundraisers and leaders, the *CCS Philanthropy Pulse: Independent School Spotlight.*

In late 2021, CCS undertook a cross-sector survey of 877 nonprofits. This report summarizes results from the 138 Independent School respondents on topics including:

- Annual fund performance
- Today's fundraising challenges and tomorrow's opportunities
- Expectations for 2022 fundraising results
- Incorporation of diversity, equity, and inclusion into development

It is our hope that this report provides a window into Independent School fundraising practices and helps your school develop data-informed fundraising strategies for the remainder of 2022 and beyond.

If you have any questions about this report or about CCS Fundraising, please contact marketing@ccsfundraising.com.
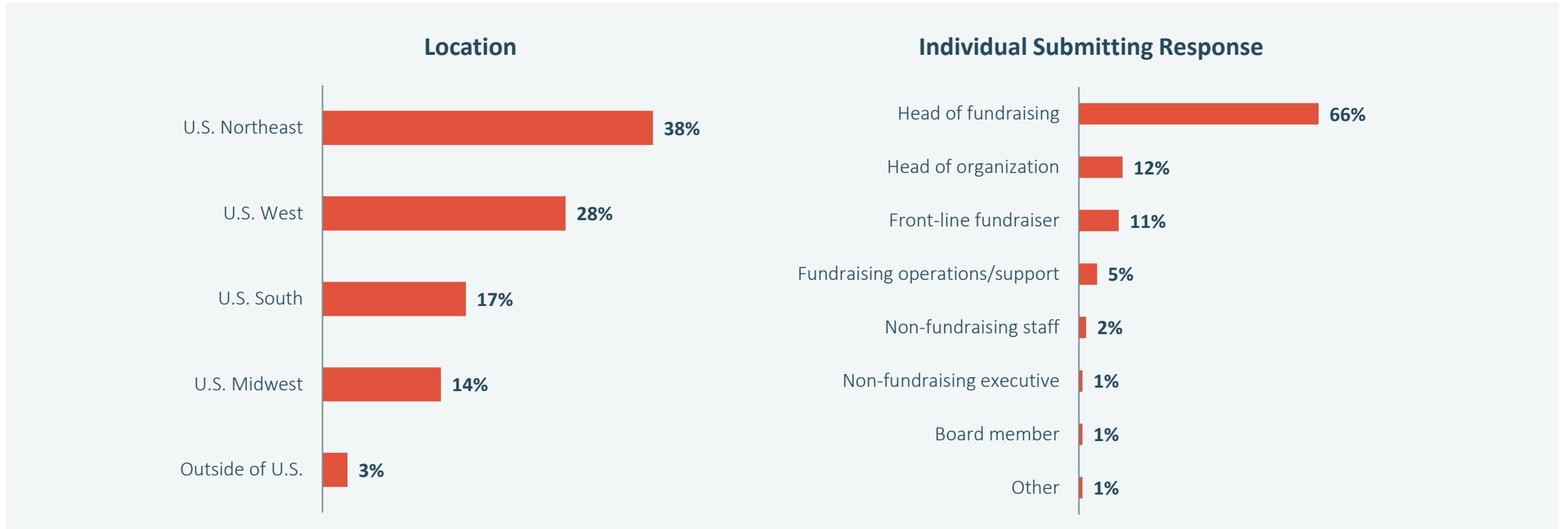
To read the main CCS Philanthropy Pulse survey report and explore more CCS research, visit our Insights Library.
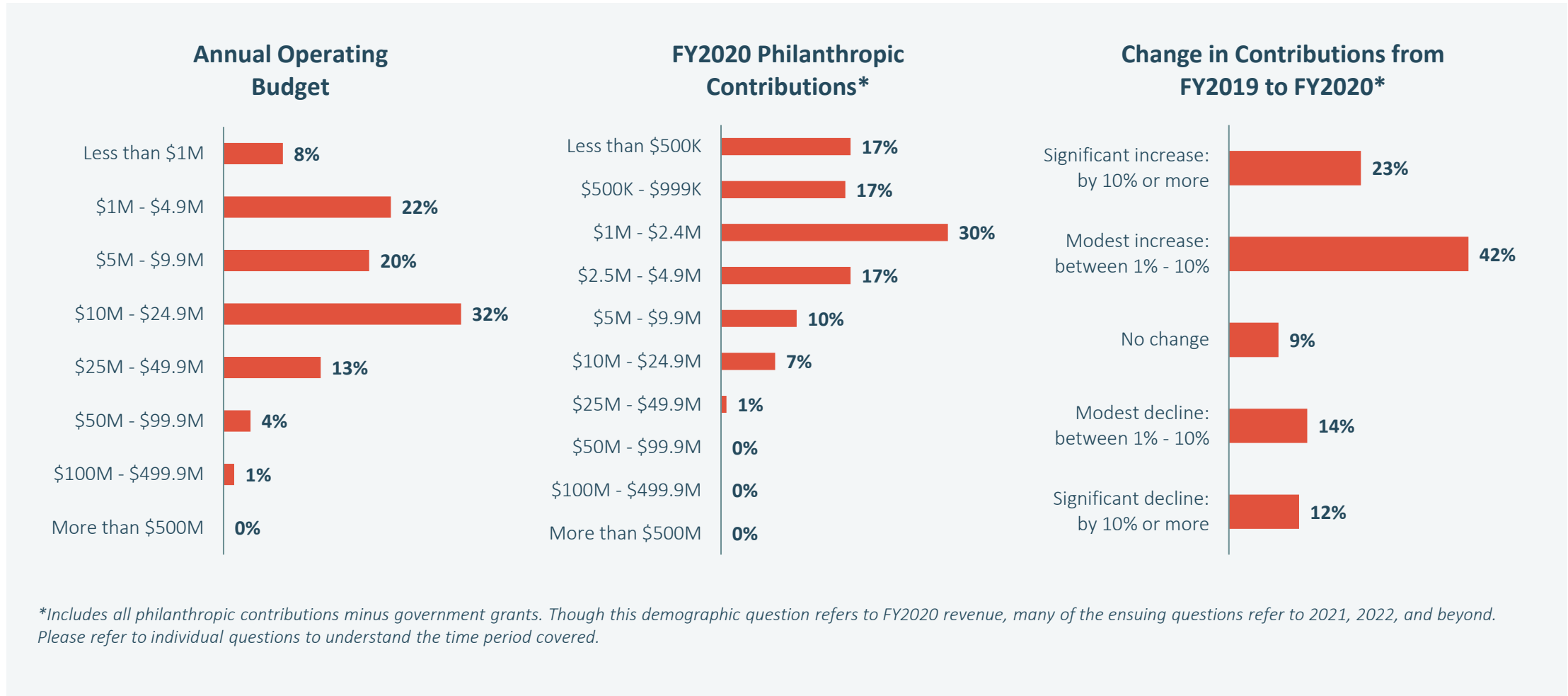
Executive Summary

1. **Eighty percent of respondents met their Fiscal Year 2021 annual fund goal**. Parents contributed the largest slice of annual fund support on average.
   → *Read more on page 8*

2. **Respondents were nearly evenly split between advancement and development models.**
   → *Read more on page 9*

3. **Donor acquisition and donor retention/stewardship were tied for the most frequently-cited fundraising challenge at 46%,** followed by 29% citing planned gifts.
   → *Read more on page 10*

4. **Nearly half (46%) of respondents cited enrollment as one of their top three greatest opportunities** as their school emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic.
   → *Read more on page 11*

5. **Eighty-four percent of schools received gifts or pledges from donor-advised funds** in the past two calendar years.
   → *Read more on page 12*

6. Looking ahead to expectations for 2022 fundraising results, **respondents expressed the most confidence in major gifts,** with 60% expecting an increase.
   → *Read more on page 13*

7. **Seven in ten participants (71%) intend to undertake some level of campaign activity this year**, whether that is planning, launching, continuing, or restarting a major campaign.
   → *Read more on page 15*

8. **Nearly three-quarters of schools (74%) had at least partially returned to in-person donor meetings and events** as of November 2021.
   → *Read more on page 16*

9. **More than two-thirds (67%) of respondents plan to permanently adopt virtual events,** while just under half (48%) plan to continue some degree of remote work.
   → *Read more on page 17*

10. **Over half (63%) of respondents reported that they include diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in their strategic plans** for future fundraising priorities. More than 9 in 10 respondents said they discuss DEI with their donors at least occasionally.
    → *Read more on page 19*

11. **The most popular tactic reported to make development more diverse, equitable, and inclusive was making changes to board recruitment and/or relations practices** (cited by 56% of respondents), followed by DEI training for staff and/or board members (cited by 55%).
    → *Read more on page 20*

12. **Respondents were most likely to rate their organization's fundraising staff as skilled in event planning** (51% rated as completely knowledgeable) **and least likely to report competency in gift planning** (3% rated as completely knowledgeable).
    → *Read more on page 22*

13. **Participating organizations commonly supplement staff capacity with external vendors and consultants. Graphic design was the most frequently-cited outsourced service** (49%), followed by DEI initiatives or enhancements (38%) and prospect research (36%).
    → *Read more on page 23*

14. **Two-thirds (66%) of respondents reported being satisfied with their school's donor database** or customer relationship management (CRM) system use. Among satisfied organizations, 67% reported that comfort in using data made the difference for their system satisfaction.
    → *Read more on page 24*

Independent School Respondents Spanned a Variety of Locations; Responses Primarily Came from Fundraising Heads

This report was generated based on data collected via an online questionnaire administered by CCS Fundraising between the dates of October 19 and November 17, 2021. All responses analyzed in this report were submitted voluntarily by 138 Independent School organizations, as described on the following two pages. These 138 Independent School responses are a subset of the 877 responses from across sectors, analyzed in CCS's main survey report. Though the makeup of our survey participants does not directly map to the demographics of the Independent School sector overall, this sample provides a window into a wide array of organization sizes and geographic locations.

Location

U.S. Northeast	38%
U.S. West	28%
U.S. South	17%
U.S. Midwest	14%
Outside of U.S.	3%

Individual Submitting Response

Head of fundraising	66%
Head of organization	12%
Front-line fundraiser	11%
Fundraising operations/support	5%
Non-fundraising staff	2%
Non-fundraising executive	1%
Board member	1%
Other	1%

Respondents Also Demonstrated Diverse Financial Situations

Annual Operating Budget

Budget	
Less than $1M	8%
$1M - $4.9M	22%
$5M - $9.9M	20%
$10M - $24.9M	32%
$25M - $49.9M	13%
$50M - $99.9M	4%
$100M - $499.9M	1%
More than $500M	0%

FY2020 Philanthropic Contributions*

Contributions	
Less than $500K	17%
$500K - $999K	17%
$1M - $2.4M	30%
$2.5M - $4.9M	17%
$5M - $9.9M	10%
$10M - $24.9M	7%
$25M - $49.9M	1%
$50M - $99.9M	0%
$100M - $499.9M	0%
More than $500M	0%

Change in Contributions from FY2019 to FY2020*

Change	
Significant increase: by 10% or more	23%
Modest increase: between 1% - 10%	42%
No change	9%
Modest decline: between 1% - 10%	14%
Significant decline: by 10% or more	12%

Includes all philanthropic contributions minus government grants. Though this demographic question refers to FY2020 revenue, many of the ensuing questions refer to 2021, 2022, and beyond. Please refer to individual questions to understand the time period covered.

Operational Overview

Most Respondents Met Their FY2021 Annual Fund Goal

Four of out every five Independent School survey participants reported that their organization met its fiscal year 2021 annual fund goal, while 17% reported not meeting their goal and 3% were not sure as of November 2021. Parents contributed the largest slice of annual fund support, on average contributing 39% of annual fund totals.

Did your school meet its fiscal year 2021 annual fund goal?

3%
17%
80%

■ Yes ■ No ■ Unsure
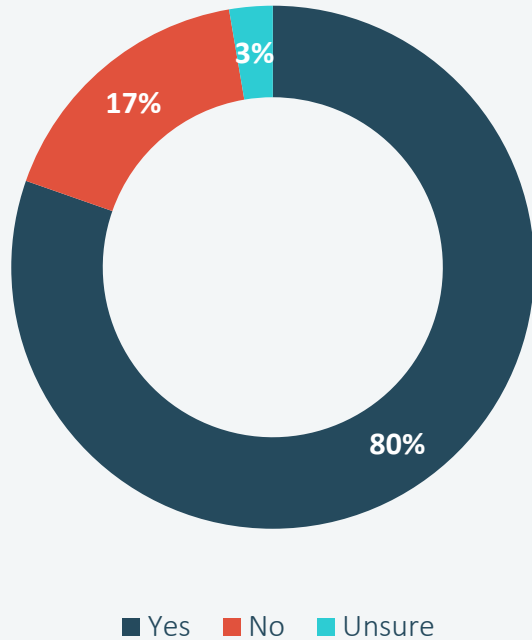
Approximately what percentage of your school's annual fund support came from:

	Median %	Average %
Parents	40%	39%
Alumni/ae	15%	23%
Trustees	17%	22%
Faculty/staff	3%	7%
Other	17%	28%

Responding Independent Schools Were Split Nearly Evenly Between Development and Advancement Models

When asked about the operating model for their school's fundraising functions, about 50% selected **development**—in which the fundraising operation of the school is a distinct office whose focus is on fundraising and alumni relations—and about 50% selected **advancement**—in which the fundraising operation is integrated into the other external (revenue-generating) operations of the school, namely admissions, marketing/communications, and events.

Does your school use a development or advancement model?

50.5%   49.5%

■ Development   ■ Advancement
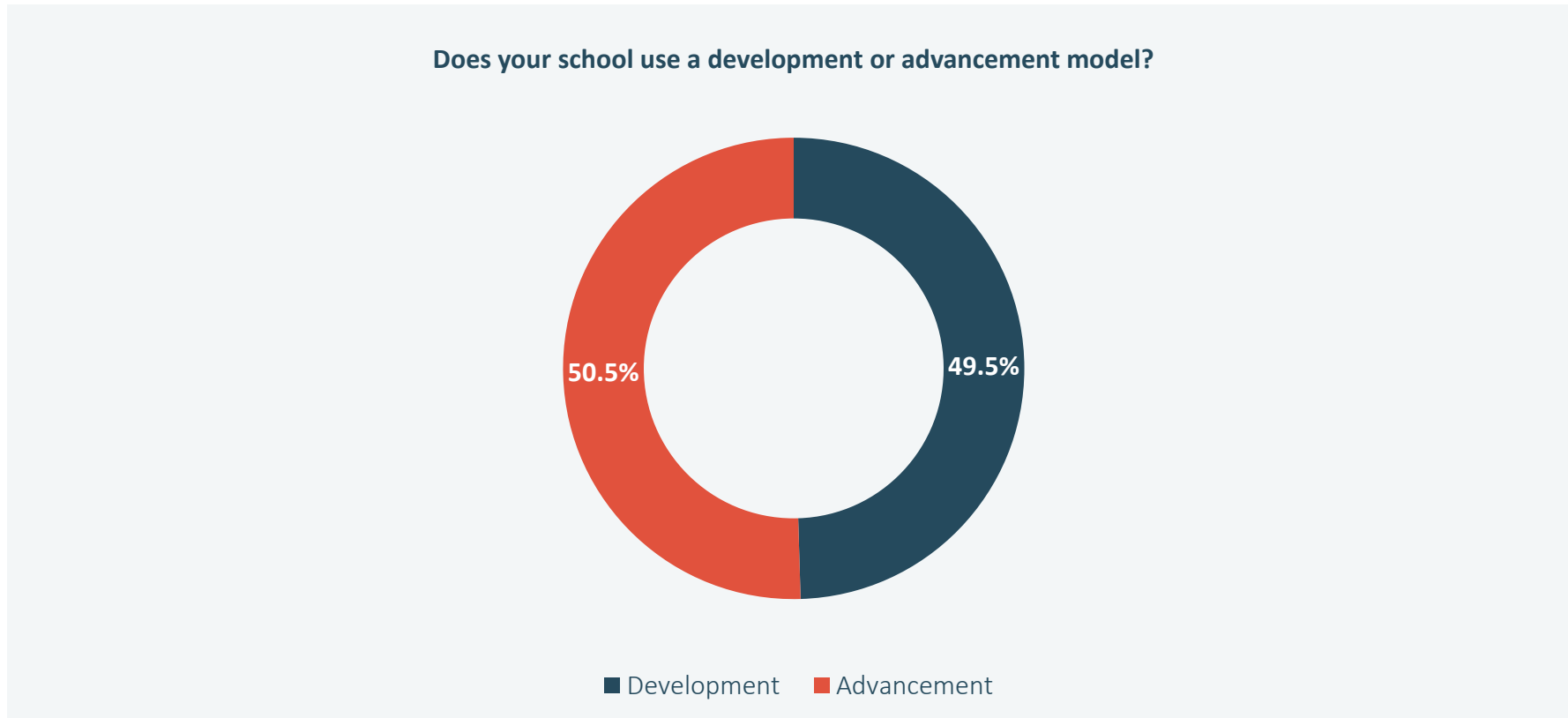
Donor Acquisition and Donor Retention Rank as Top Challenges

When asked to select the top three fundraising challenges their organization is facing today, respondents most frequently cited donor acquisition, donor retention and stewardship, and increasing deferred (planned) gifts.

What are the top challenges your organization is facing today in its fundraising?

Challenge	Percentage
Donor acquisition	46%
Donor retention/stewardship	46%
Increasing deferred (planned) gifts	29%
Leveraging data to make better decisions	28%
Hiring and retaining fundraising staff members	25%
Working toward diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) goals	17%
Navigating data management issues (e.g., in your CRM)	14%
Shifting donor interests	14%
Adjustment to a more digital world	13%
Budget cuts	12%
Securing more gifts of non-cash assets	4%
Other	4%

Respondents could select up to three challenges

Enrollment Is Ranked as the Greatest Area of Opportunity for Pandemic Emergence

When asked to select their school's top three areas of opportunity as it emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, the three most frequently selected choices were enrollment (46%), parent morale/engagement (35%), and alumni giving participation (34%).

What are the greatest opportunities for your school as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic?

Enrollment	Parent morale/ engagement	Alumni giving participation	Parent giving participation	Campaign	Annual fund	Events	Planned giving	Other
46%	35%	34%	25%	24%	20%	19%	16%	6%

Respondents could select up to three challenges
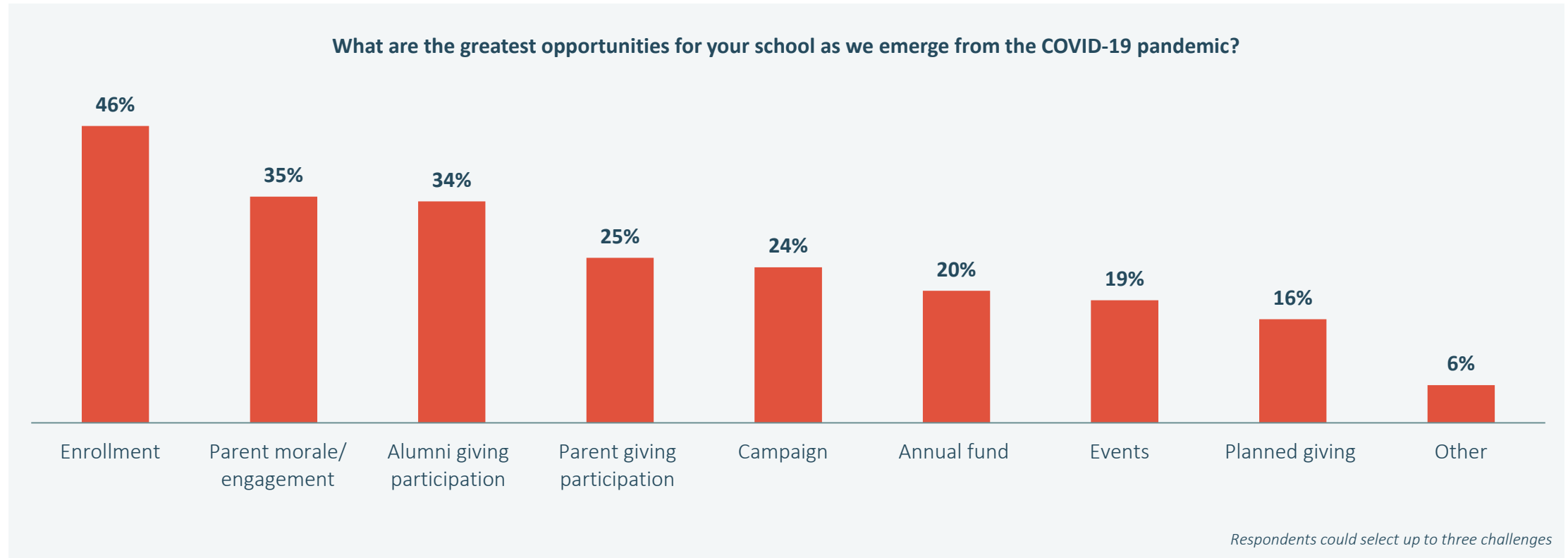
Donor-Advised Fund Gifts Are Common

Out of all Independent School respondents, 84% reported that their organization had received gifts and/or pledges from donor-advised funds over the past two calendar years. Gifts from family foundations and gifts of appreciated assets were also cited by most respondents.

In the past two calendar years, has your organization received gifts and/or pledges from any of these gift sources or vehicles?

*E.g., stocks, securities
**Qualified retirement plan beneficiary designations and/or IRA-qualified charitable distribution
*** E.g., charitable remainder trust, charitable remainder unitrust
**** Sale of an asset to your organization at less than fair market value

Respondents could select all answers that apply

60% of Respondents Expect an Increase in Major Gifts in 2022

Among organizations who fundraise from major gifts, 60% say they expect an increase in fundraising results from major gifts in 2022, 10% say they expect a decline, and 29% say they expect results to stay the same. At least half of respondents also indicated that they expect an increase for mid-level gifts, events, and the annual appeal.

Do you anticipate a change in results for each of the following fundraising programs for the upcoming calendar year 2022, compared to the results you've seen in calendar year 2021 to date?

	Major Gifts	Mid-Level Gifts	Events	Annual Appeal	Membership	Deferred (Planned) Gift Commitments	Foundations	Direct Marketing	Corporations	Government Grants
Decline in 2022	10%	3%	13%	8%	15%	6%	8%	4%	7%	33%
Stay Same in 2022	29%	42%	37%	43%	38%	54%	59%	67%	67%	44%
Increase in 2022	60%	55%	51%	50%	46%	40%	33%	29%	26%	22%

Legend: ■ Increase in 2022 ■ Stay Same in 2022 ■ Decline in 2022

Excludes organizations that selected "Not Applicable," indicating that the organization does not fundraise from this area

More Than 90% of Respondents Fundraise from Major Gifts, Mid-Level Gifts, and Annual Appeals

Only 6%, 5%, and 4% of Independent School respondents selected "not applicable" when asked about their expectations for major gifts, mid-level gifts, and annual appeals, respectively. By contrast, only 35% of respondents indicated that they *do* fundraise from government grants and only 10% indicated that they use membership programs.
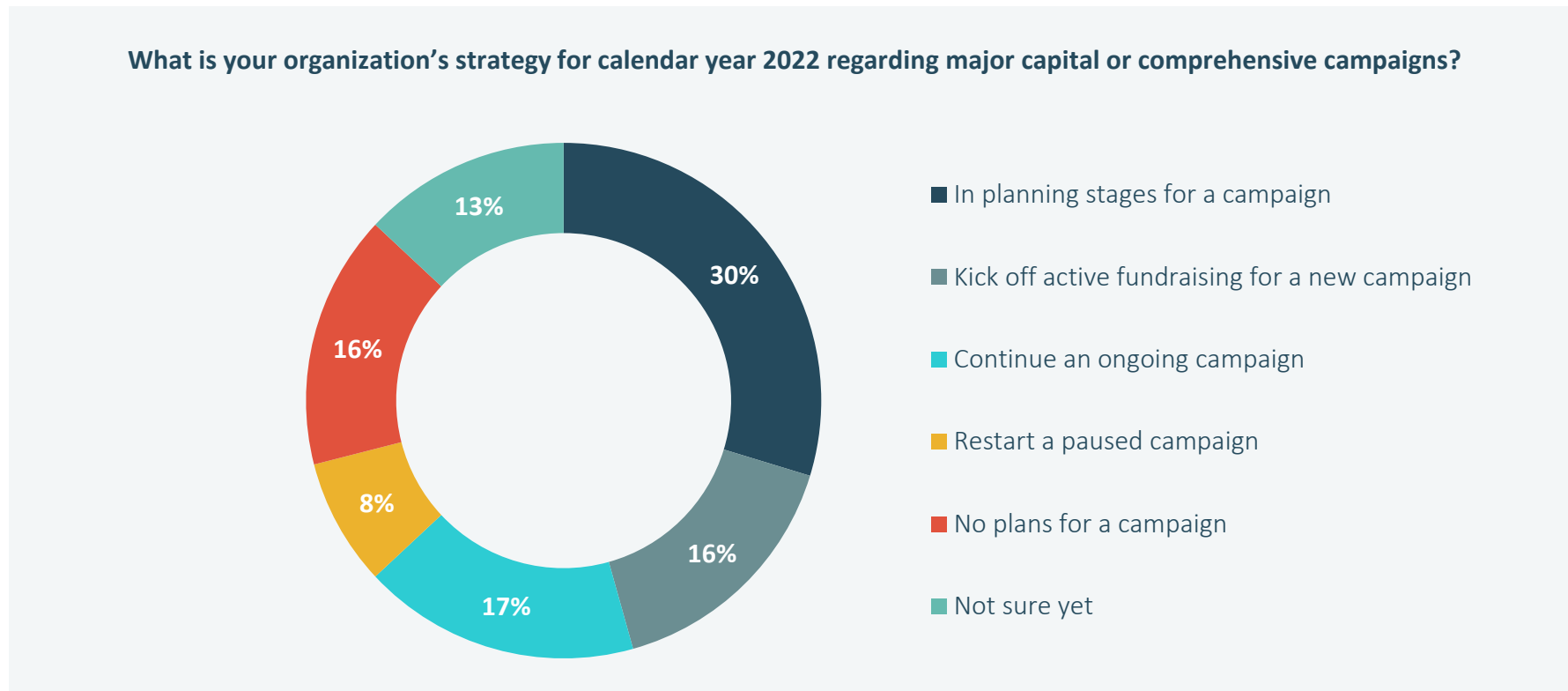
Do you anticipate a change in results for each of the following fundraising programs for the upcoming calendar year 2022, compared to the results you've seen in calendar year 2021 to date?

	Increase in 2022	Stay Same in 2022	Decline in 2022	Not Applicable
Major Gifts	57%	27%	10%	6%
Mid-Level Gifts	52%	39%	3%	5%
Annual Appeal	47%	41%	7%	4%
Events	42%	30%	10%	17%
Foundations	29%	52%	7%	12%
Deferred (Planned) Gift Commitments	26%	34%	4%	36%
Corporations	18%	47%	5%	31%
Direct Marketing	15%	35%	2%	47%
Government Grants	8%	15%	12%	65%
Membership	5%	4%	2%	90%

71% of Respondents Intend to Undertake Some Level of Campaign Activity This Year

A combined 71% of Independent Schools in CCS's survey intend to undertake some sort of campaign activity in 2022, whether that activity is planning, launching, continuing, or restarting a campaign. Sixteen percent of schools in the sample have no plans for a campaign, and 13% were not yet sure of their organization's plans.

What is your organization's strategy for calendar year 2022 regarding major capital or comprehensive campaigns?

- In planning stages for a campaign
- Kick off active fundraising for a new campaign
- Continue an ongoing campaign
- Restart a paused campaign
- No plans for a campaign
- Not sure yet

74% of Organizations at Least Partially Returned to In-Person Donor Engagement since the Start of the COVID-19 Pandemic

As of November 2021, nearly three-quarters (74%) of responding organizations had at least partially resumed in-person donor meetings and/or events. Just over one-fifth (21%) had completely resumed activities as of November and just over half (53%) had partially resumed activities.

When do you anticipate your organization being ready to resume in-person donor meetings and/or events?

- Already have resumed these activities completely
- Already have resumed these activities partially
- Plan to resume in the first half of 2022
- Plan to resume in the second half of 2022 or later
- Still unknown

More Than Two-Thirds of Respondents Plan to Permanently Adopt Virtual Events

Just over two-thirds (67%) of Independent School respondents said that they plan to continue the pandemic-era adjustment to virtual events. Just under half (48%) of respondents reported that their organization plans to continue some level of remote work, but only 14% of respondents indicated that they would continue full-time remote work schedules.

What practices has your organization adjusted during the COVID-19 pandemic that you plan to continue?

Category	Percent
Virtual events	67%
Remote work (part-time or full-time)	48%
Enhanced social media presence	45%
Enhanced personalized communication	42%
Remote work (part-time/occasional)	41%
Digital giving	41%
Virtual gift requests	38%
New or deeper engagement of certain donor groups	30%
Remote work (full-time)	14%
Gift planning focus	9%
Other	2%
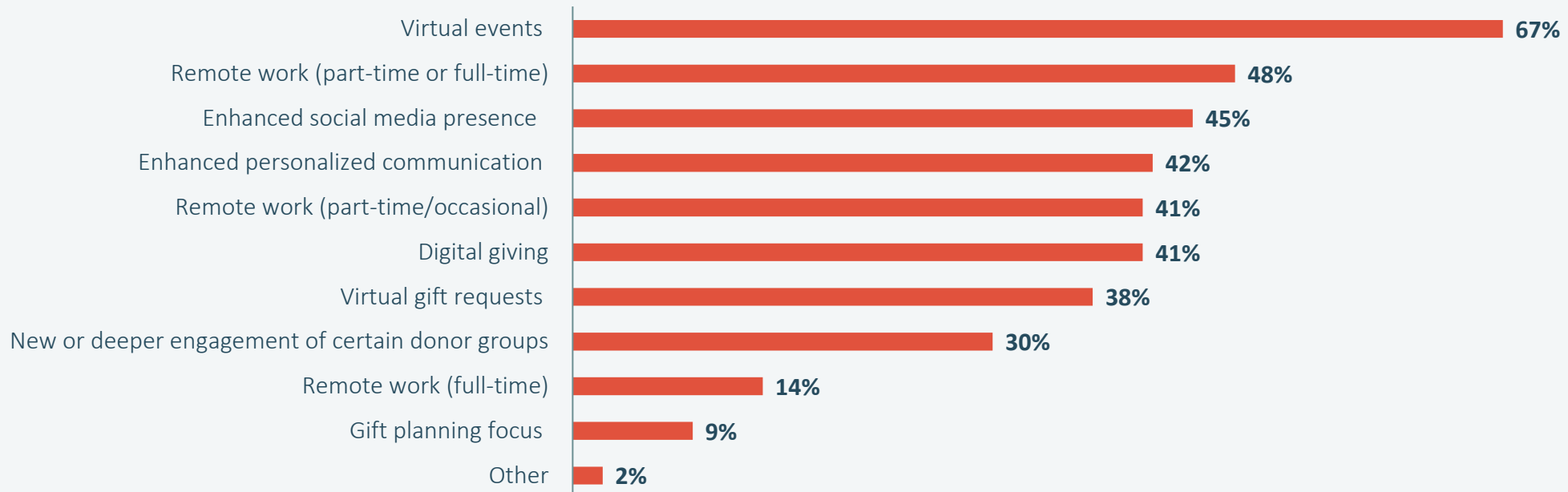
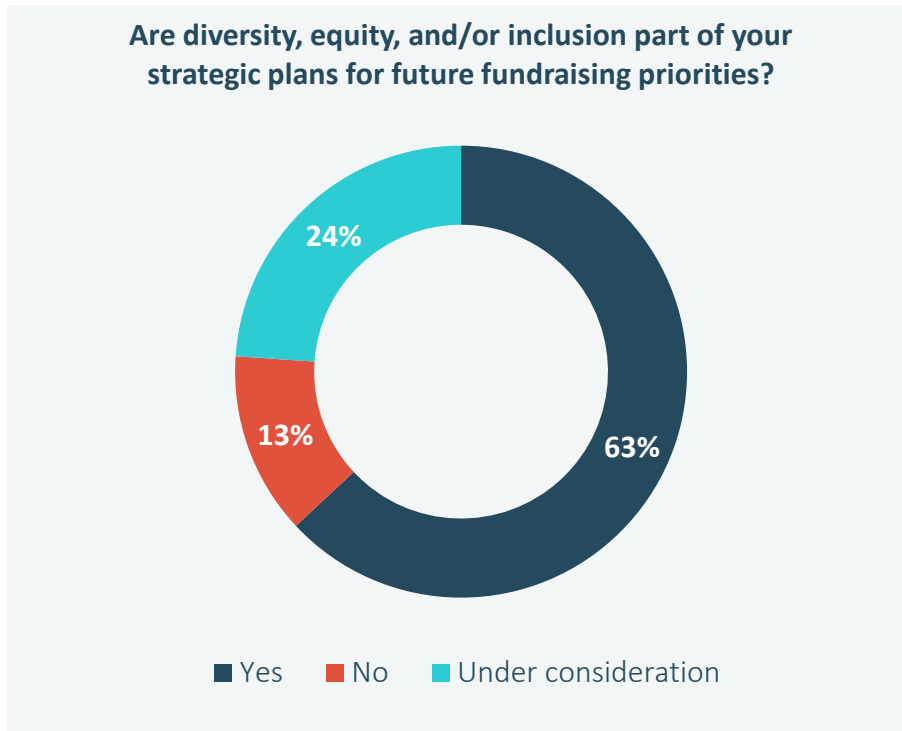*Respondents could select all answers that apply*

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Donor Relations

More Than Half of Respondents Include DEI in Strategic Plans and Nearly All Discuss DEI with Donors at Least Occasionally

Responding schools demonstrated support for incorporating diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) into donor relations practices, with 63% reporting that diversity, equity, and/or inclusion are part of their strategic plans for future fundraising priorities. More than 9 in 10 respondents said they discuss DEI with their donors at least occasionally.
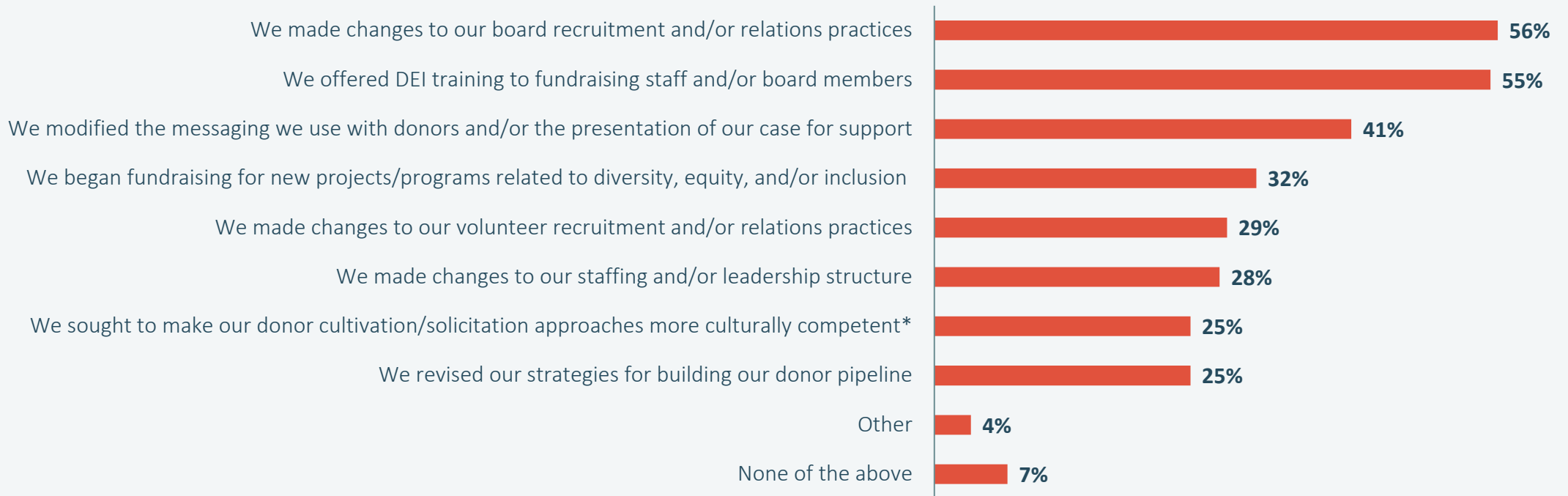
When answering questions in this section, respondents were asked to consider an expansive definition of "diversity, equity, and inclusion" to address a broad set of identities including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, national origin, ability, and other visible and invisible traits.

Are diversity, equity, and/or inclusion part of your strategic plans for future fundraising priorities?

24%
63%
13%

■ Yes ■ No ■ Under consideration

Does your organization discuss the concepts of diversity, equity, and/or inclusion in your conversations with donors?

6%
24%
35%
36%

■ Yes, always ■ Yes, frequently
■ Yes, occasionally ■ No

Please note all percentages are rounded.

Board-Related Changes and DEI Training Were the Most Frequently Cited Tactics to Meet DEI Goals

When asked what tactics their organization has employed over the past two years to make their fundraising activities more diverse, equitable, and/or inclusive, more than half of Independent School respondents reported making changes to board recruitment and/or relations practices (56%) and offering DEI training to fundraising staff and/or board members (55%).

In the past two years, what tactics has your organization employed to make your fundraising practices/operations more diverse, equitable, and inclusive?

Tactic	Percentage
We made changes to our board recruitment and/or relations practices	56%
We offered DEI training to fundraising staff and/or board members	55%
We modified the messaging we use with donors and/or the presentation of our case for support	41%
We began fundraising for new projects/programs related to diversity, equity, and/or inclusion	32%
We made changes to our volunteer recruitment and/or relations practices	29%
We made changes to our staffing and/or leadership structure	28%
We sought to make our donor cultivation/solicitation approaches more culturally competent*	25%
We revised our strategies for building our donor pipeline	25%
Other	4%
None of the above	7%

*E.g., tailoring engagement approaches for a major donor based on the complex and intersecting components of the donor's identity

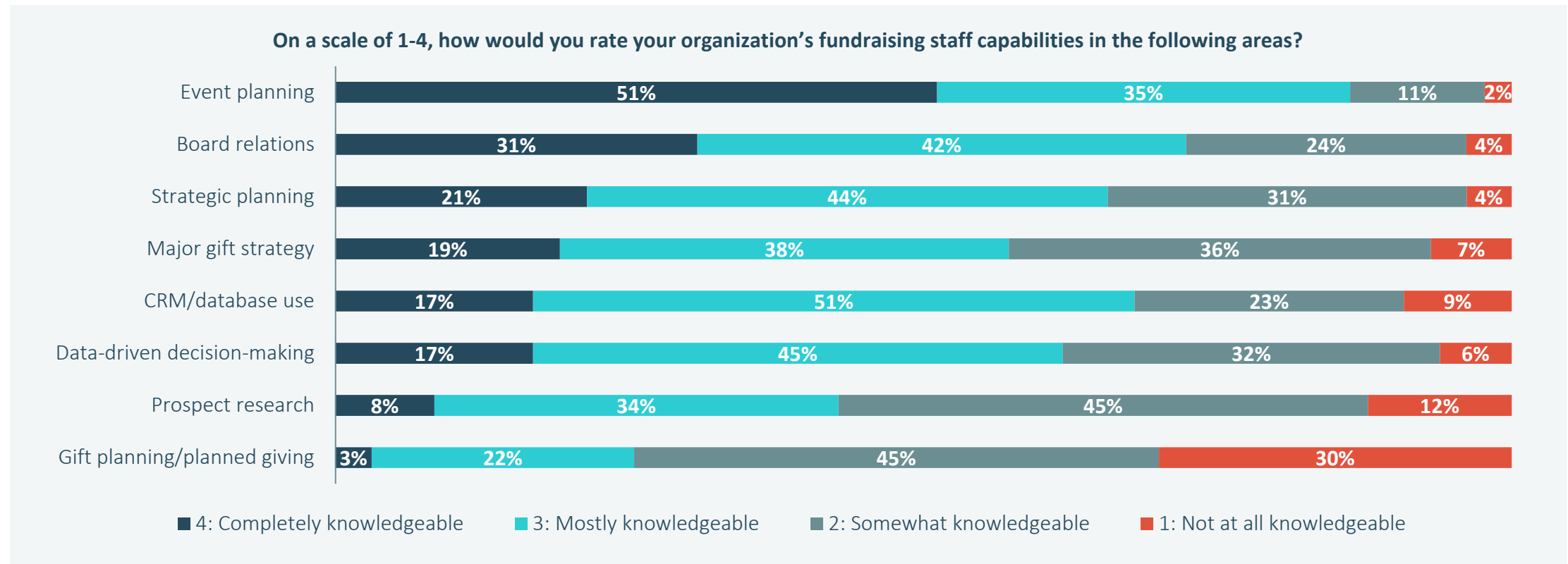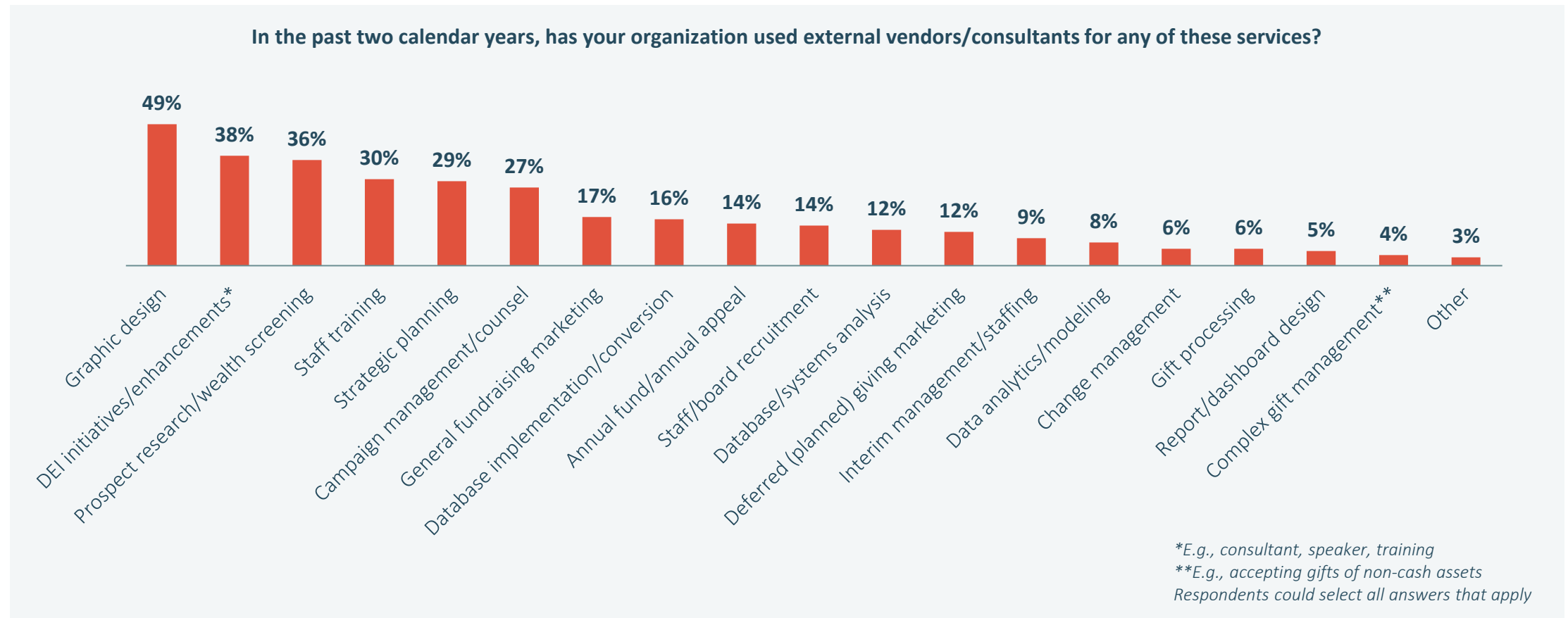*Respondents could select all answers that apply*

Event Planning Was Rated as the Area in Which Fundraising Staff Have the Highest Levels of Expertise

When asked to rate the knowledge of their fundraising staff in a variety of areas, Independent School respondents were most likely to report competency in event planning and board relations. Gift planning was the area where organizations were most likely to report lower levels of staff knowledge, with only 3% of schools saying that their fundraising staff is completely knowledgeable in gift planning while 30% said that their staff is not at all knowledgeable in this area.

On a scale of 1-4, how would you rate your organization's fundraising staff capabilities in the following areas?

Area	4: Completely knowledgeable	3: Mostly knowledgeable	2: Somewhat knowledgeable	1: Not at all knowledgeable
Event planning	51%	35%	11%	2%
Board relations	31%	42%	24%	4%
Strategic planning	21%	44%	31%	4%
Major gift strategy	19%	38%	36%	7%
CRM/database use	17%	51%	23%	9%
Data-driven decision-making	17%	45%	32%	6%
Prospect research	8%	34%	45%	12%
Gift planning/planned giving	3%	22%	45%	30%

More Than 1 in 3 Respondents Sought External Assistance on Graphic Design, DEI Initiatives, and Prospect Research

Nearly half (49%) of Independent School respondents reported that their organization used external graphic design assistance in the past two years. More than one-third indicated that they employed external vendors or consultants for DEI initiatives (38%) and prospect research (36%).
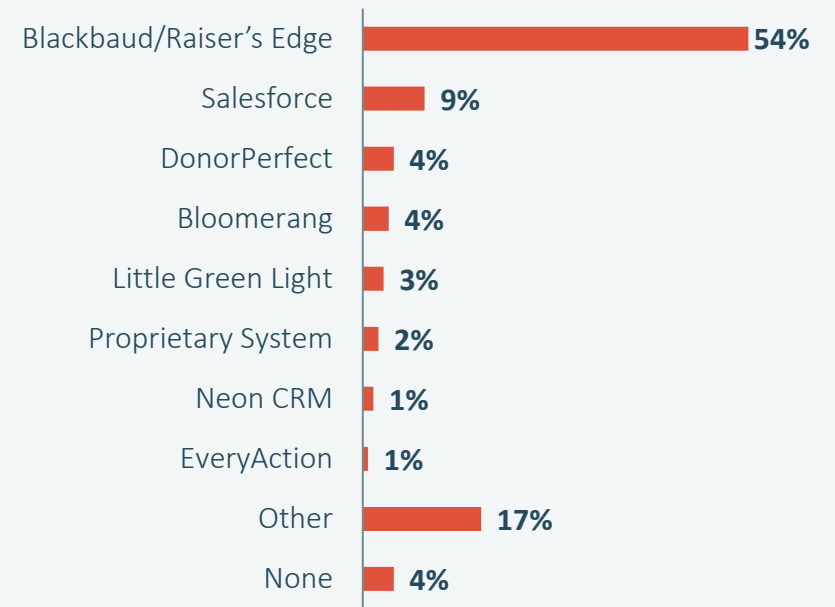
In the past two calendar years, has your organization used external vendors/consultants for any of these services?

Category	%
Graphic design	49%
DEI initiatives/enhancements*	38%
Prospect research/wealth screening	36%
Staff training	30%
Strategic planning	29%
Campaign management/counsel	27%
General fundraising marketing	17%
Database implementation/conversion	16%
Annual fund/annual appeal	14%
Staff/board recruitment	14%
Database/systems analysis	12%
Deferred (planned) giving marketing	12%
Interim management/staffing	9%
Data analytics/modeling	8%
Change management	6%
Gift processing	6%
Report/dashboard design	5%
Complex gift management**	4%
Other	3%

*E.g., consultant, speaker, training
**E.g., accepting gifts of non-cash assets
Respondents could select all answers that apply

Two-Thirds of Respondents Are Satisfied with Their Organization's CRM Use

A combined 66% of Independent School respondents reported that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with their organization's CRM use—inclusive of both the software itself and the processes around using the system. About 16% of organizations reported being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, and 18% said they were unsure. The most popular CRM systems among the respondent pool were those made by Blackbaud, with 54% of organizations indicating that they currently use this software.

How would you rate your organization's satisfaction with its donor database use, considering not only the software itself, but also the processes your organization uses to enter, maintain, and use the information in the system?
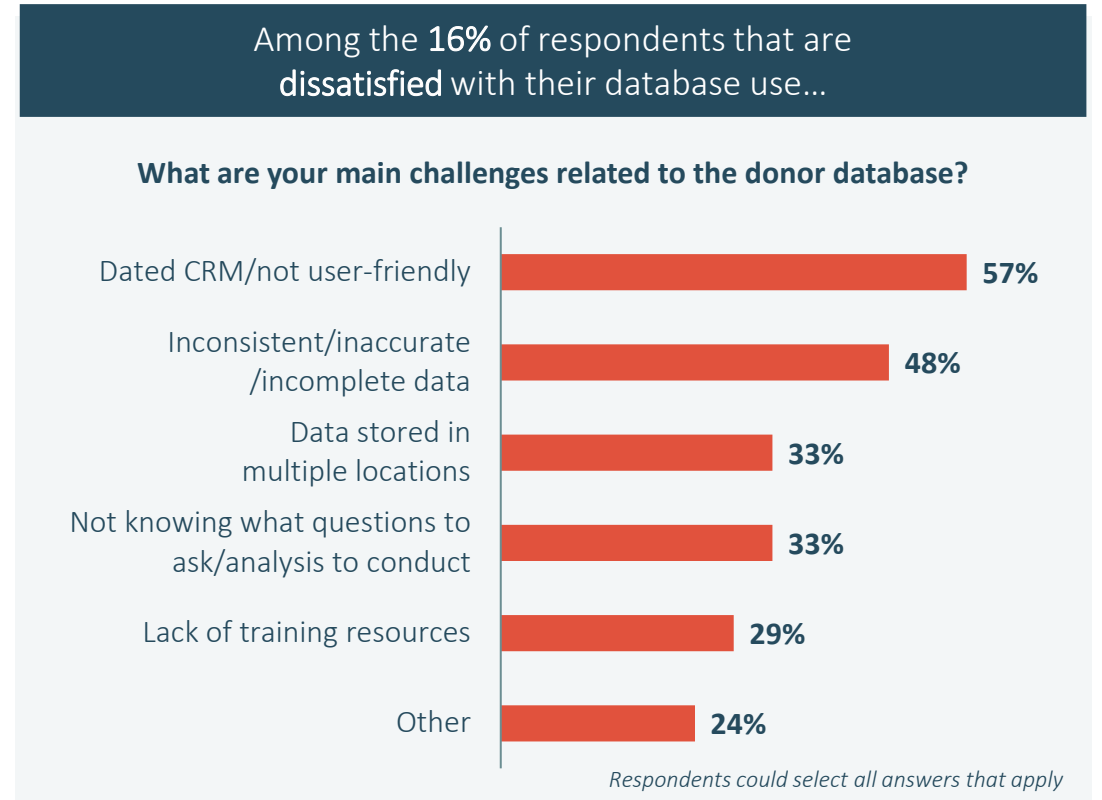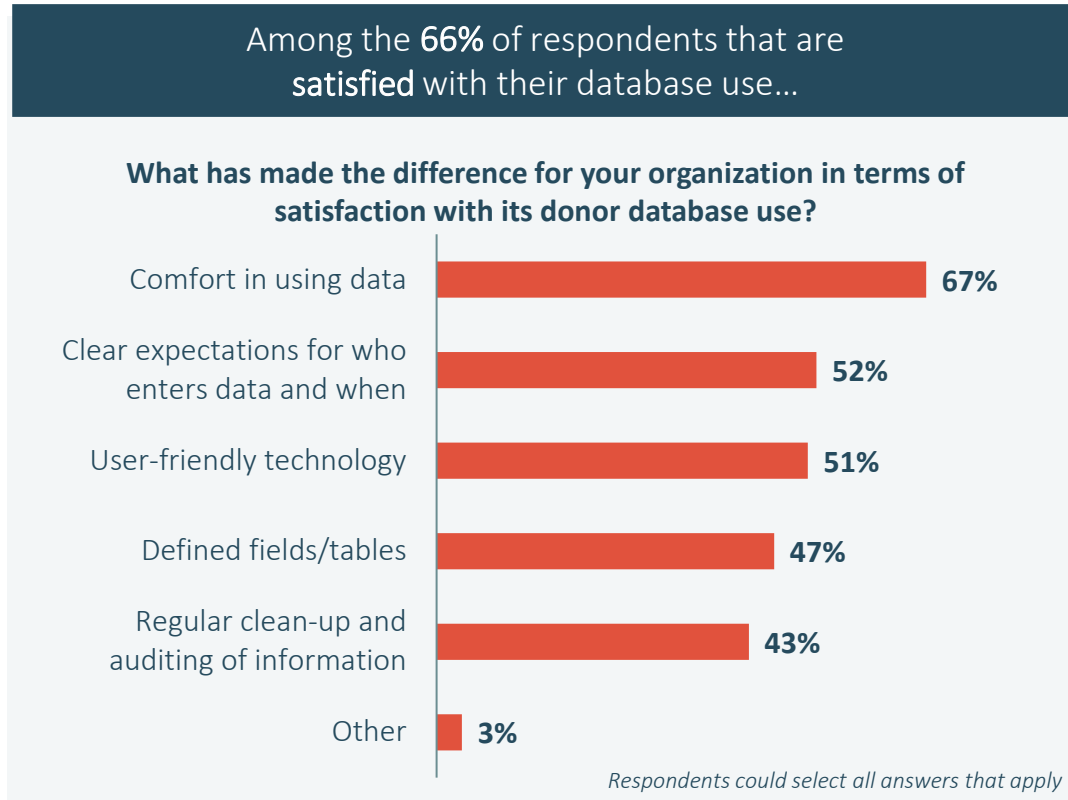
- 15% Very satisfied
- 51% Satisfied
- 18% Unsure
- 14% Dissatisfied
- 2% Very dissatisfied
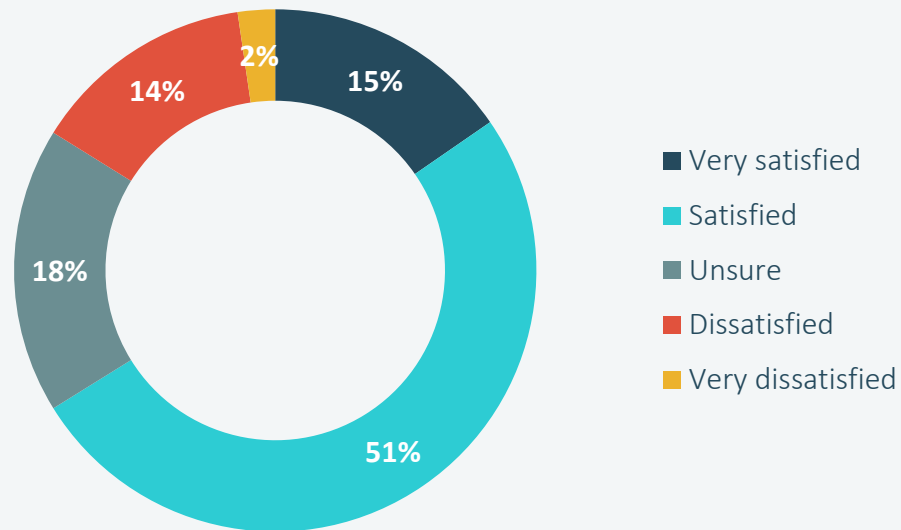
What donor database/CRM (customer relationship management) software does your organization currently use?

Blackbaud/Raiser's Edge	54%
Salesforce	9%
DonorPerfect	4%
Bloomerang	4%
Little Green Light	3%
Proprietary System	2%
Neon CRM	1%
EveryAction	1%
Other	17%
None	4%

Respondents could select all answers that apply

Clear Expectations for Data Entry Make a Difference in CRM Satisfaction Levels

Among Independent School respondents that reported being satisfied with their database use, 67% said that clear expectations for data entry made a difference in their satisfaction. Among the organizations who reported being dissatisfied, the most frequently cited database challenges were a dated, non-user-friendly customer relationship management (CRM) system (57%) and inconsistent, inaccurate, or incomplete data (48%).

Among the **66%** of respondents that are **satisfied** with their database use…

What has made the difference for your organization in terms of satisfaction with its donor database use?

Comfort in using data	67%
Clear expectations for who enters data and when	52%
User-friendly technology	51%
Defined fields/tables	47%
Regular clean-up and auditing of information	43%
Other	3%

Respondents could select all answers that apply

Among the **16%** of respondents that are **dissatisfied** with their database use…

What are your main challenges related to the donor database?

Dated CRM/not user-friendly	57%
Inconsistent/inaccurate /incomplete data	48%
Data stored in multiple locations	33%
Not knowing what questions to ask/analysis to conduct	33%
Lack of training resources	29%
Other	24%

Respondents could select all answers that apply

About CCS Fundraising

For 75 years, CCS Fundraising has empowered many of the world's greatest organizations to advance some of the most important causes in history. As leading consulting experts in development and campaign strategy, we plan and implement fundraising initiatives to help nonprofit organizations make a bigger impact—locally, nationally, and globally.

Our services include:

- Campaign Planning & Management
- Data Analytics
- Systems Projects
- Interim Development Management

- Development Audits & Assessments
- Gift Planning Assessments
- Strategic Planning
- Specialized Development Projects

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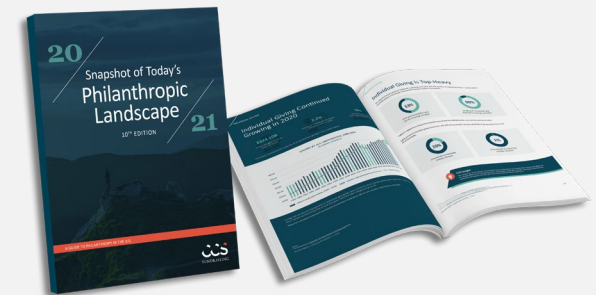
FEATURED INSIGHT:
Snapshot of Today's Philanthropic Landscape
Tenth Edition | July 2021

Featuring essential philanthropic research from all major sources in the industry, this exclusive report examines key themes in American philanthropy and data on giving by U.S. individuals, foundations, and corporations.

Click here to download the report.

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