

Issues facing fundraising professionals in sport and non-sport organizations: An exploratory study

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Research addressing the work and careers of fundraising professionals is a severely limited yet growing research endeavor (Lindahl & Conley, 2002). The majority of studies in this area have focused on the demographic characteristics, income information, and competencies of fundraising professionals (Carbone, 1989; Lane & Levis, 1989; Cook, 1994; Duronio & Tempel, 1997). Largely, research addressing philanthropy has focused on the gender differences and motivations of potential donors across various settings.

While understanding donors is a significant contribution to the field and practitioners, inquiries into the nature and future of the philanthropic field warrant serious merit and consideration as well. However, there is a considerable dearth of research examining issues regarding fundraising professionals and the profession as a whole. This is significant because scholars have illustrated that the field of philanthropy has struggled to gain legitimacy and credibility as an established profession unlike the legal and medical sectors (Bloland & Tempel, 2004). Therefore, this study seeks to ascertain the challenges that fundraising professionals face in the sport and non-sport industry.

Furthermore, this study will compare and contrast issues facing fundraising professionals working in the two settings. Specifically, 31 structured interviews were conducted with various development professionals to determine the issues facing modern fundraisers in sport and non-sport organizations. Previous research in the sport realm has focused solely on the issues related to fundraising in the university setting and specifically as it relates to university athletic departments.

Conversely, the sample for this study represents a broad range of fundraisers that work for community and national entities that deal with sport and recreation and these settings have failed to be examined by previous research. Furthermore, this is the first study of its kind to investigate the similarities and differences that exist for fundraising professionals in the sport and non-sport work setting. A number of expected themes were developed from an analysis of the interview data including the challenges that fundraising professionals face, the professional preparation for their roles as fundraisers, and a description of the future trends expected in the field of philanthropy.

For data analysis, this study employed a categorical coding technique to uncover relevant themes. This technique has been shown to be compatible with the utilization of a structured interview protocol (Rossman & Rallis, 2007). This study represents one of the first attempts to uncover issues in the development field from the perspective of fundraising professionals by juxtaposing the issues and characteristics of fundraisers in sport and non-sport organizations. Significant similarities and differences were found regarding the challenges and issues that face sport and non-sport fundraisers. This research represents another step in the journey for the field of philanthropy to be recognized as a legitimate and credible profession. Finally, it is hoped that fund raising practitioners can utilize this information to more efficiently and effectively seek funds in the future.