**Study Overview**

During spring 2016 we surveyed representatives of 164 higher education retirement organizations throughout the United States. The survey focused on the membership, operation, benefits, and impact of the Retirement Organizations (ROs). It also asked questions related to the RO’s key challenges and sustainability. We received 90 survey responses for a response rate of 54.9%.

### Membership and Mission:

- Most ROs include both retired faculty (93%) and staff (68%). At 42% of institutions, RO membership includes only 40% or less of the institution’s retirees.
- Most ROs welcome spouses and partners (74%). However, only about one third include persons nearing retirement or persons retired from other institutions.
  - These findings suggest ROs may be missing an opportunity to expand their membership while also increasing their visibility and political strength/influence.
- Programs/Services include: Social events (89%); Learning opportunities (87%); service opportunities (62%); advocacy (62%).
- Fewer than half of ROs indicated they offer recognition/awards for retiree achievements/service, research support/funding, or programs on retirement issues and opportunities for those considering retirement.
  - ROs may want to consider the merits of expanding their mission and services to enhance their value and impact.

### Staffing, Revenue, and Accountability

According to survey results, 42% of ROs are free standing organizations with no formal affiliation with a university or college. 27% are accountable to or submit reports to the institution’s chief academic officer. Smaller numbers report to HR, alumni, or development offices. The merits of organizational independence vs. affiliation with an institution is a subject worth discussion by ROs.

Most ROs have limited staff support which may limit RO initiatives and services. 51% reported they have 0 paid full-time staff; 21% reported having one paid part-time staff member; 44% have 0 part-time paid staff; 36% reported 0 unpaid, part-time staff.

#### Identified Revenue Sources

- Membership dues = 60%
- Subsidies from administrative units within the institution (e.g., provost's office or HR) = 51%;
- annual fund raising = 24%
- Endowment = 18%
- Outside Grant Funding = 1%

There seems to be considerable potential for more strategic RO fund raising beyond normal revenue sources.
Outcomes & Benefits

- The most commonly cited benefits of ROs included maintaining connections with the institution (92%); maintaining relationships with colleagues and friends (92%), service to the institution (69%), aiding in the transition to retirement (48%)
- Less frequently cited benefits included support for current faculty (37%), mentoring (18%), and increased or continuing financial contributions to the institution. These are potential areas where ROs could enhance their value and impact.

Challenges and Sustainability:

- **Visibility** (69%) and **Membership** (58%) were the two most frequently cited RO challenges.
- Other frequently cited concerns included **Meeting Members’ Needs** (54%) and **Maintaining Adequate Revenue** (32%)
  - Sustainability may be an issue for ROs that do not address these challenges effectively.

Assessment and Adaptation:

- The majority of RO representatives (72%) reported “the benefits of their RO outweigh its costs.”
- Only 17% purported their RO is very effective at fulfilling its mission; 73% reported their RO is somewhat effective.
- Most ROs are evaluated only informally: Primary evaluation methods included Informal discussion with members (46%), personal observations (11%)
- Evaluation data collected directly from retirees or those nearing retirement (8%)
- No evaluation system (26%)

More systematic evaluation methods may help ROs to monitor, publicize, and strengthen their performance.

**Question 18: Outcomes & Benefits of the Organization**

**Primary Evaluation Methods**

**Greatest Challenges**
### Areas of Agreement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>RO Member</th>
<th>Liaison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcomes and Benefits</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining Institutional Connections</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining friendships/relationships</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service to Institution</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service to Community</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aiding faculty/staff to transition to retirement</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Challenges</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Differing Perspectives Deserving Consideration:

- Meeting the needs of RO members (RO representatives, 54%; Institutional liaisons, 33%)
- Benefits of the RO outweigh its costs (RO representatives, 72%; Institutional liaisons, 50%)

ROs may need to communicate their value more explicitly to their institutional community.

### Cost/Benefit Analysis:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Retirement Organization Representatives vs. Liaisons</th>
<th>Liaisons</th>
<th>RO Reps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Costs Outweigh the Benefits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs and Benefits are about Equal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits Outweigh the Costs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unable to Estimate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Organizational Influence on Senior Faculty Decisions to Retire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact on Senior Faculty Decisions to Retire</th>
<th>Liasions</th>
<th>RO Reps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positively. Made retirement a more attractive option</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No impact. Has neither facilitated nor impeded senior professors</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No knowledge</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Should organizations know how they are influencing retirement decisions to justify their value, especially if they are seeking/receiving institutional support?

## Issues and Opportunities to Consider

- **Overlooked opportunities?**
  - Expanding mission and membership?
  - Potential for revenue enhancement?
  - Increasing visibility and publicity?
  - Outreach to the institution?

For an electronic copy of this handout, please visit the following website:

http://chae.msu.edu/people/roger-baldwin