

Under the Microscope:

Investigating the Benefits and Impact of Retirement Organizations in Higher Education

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.

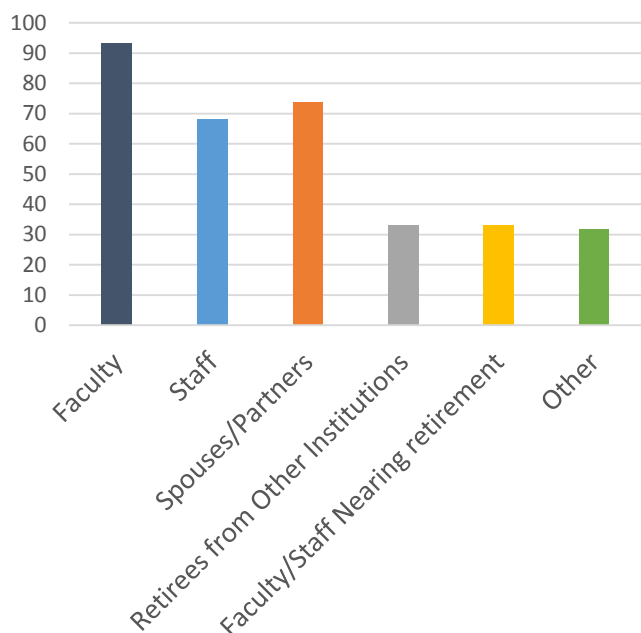
Most ROs have limited staff support which may limit RO initiatives and services. 51% reported they have 0 paid full-time staff; 21% reported having one paid part-time staff member; 44% have 0 part-time paid staff; 36% reported 0 unpaid, part-time staff

Identified Revenue Sources

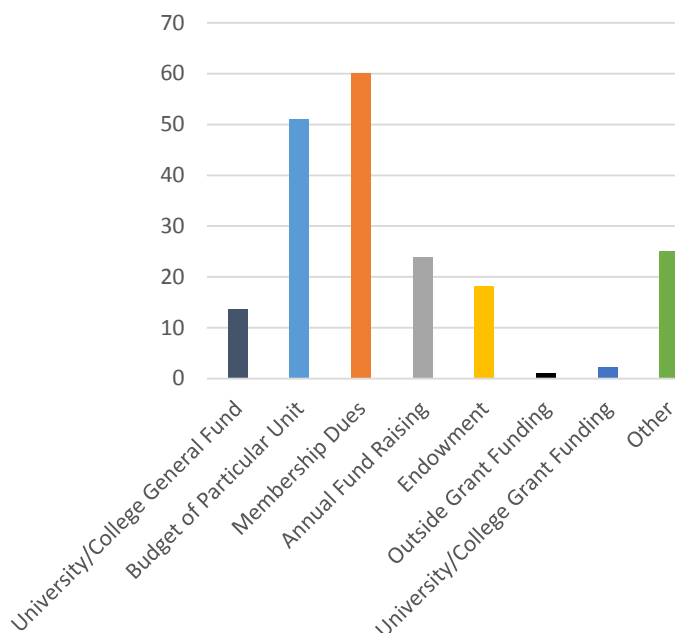
- Membership dues = 60%
- Subsidies from administrative units within the institution (e.g., provost's office or HR) = 51%;
- annual fund raising = 24%
- Endowment = 18%
- Outside Grant Funding = 1%

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

Membership Demographics



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:

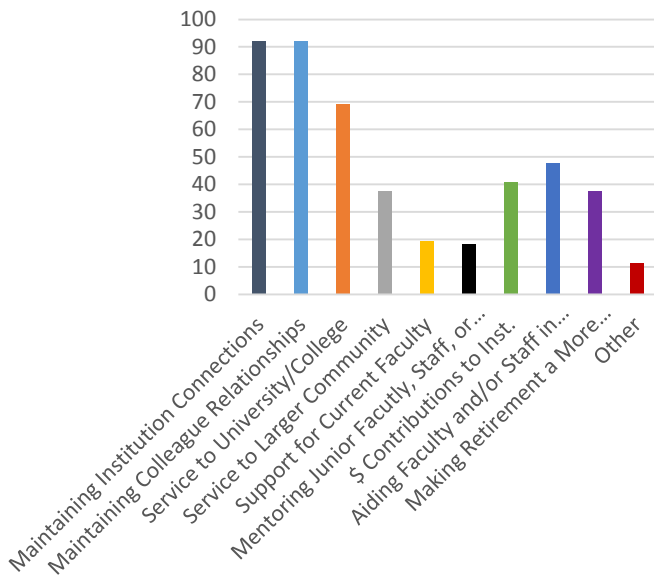
- Visibility (69%) and Membership (58%) were the two most frequently cited RO challenges
- Other frequently cited concerns included Meeting Members' Needs (54%) and Maintaining Adequate Revenue (32%)
 - Sustainability may be an issue for ROs that do not address these challenges effectively.

Assessment and Adaptation:

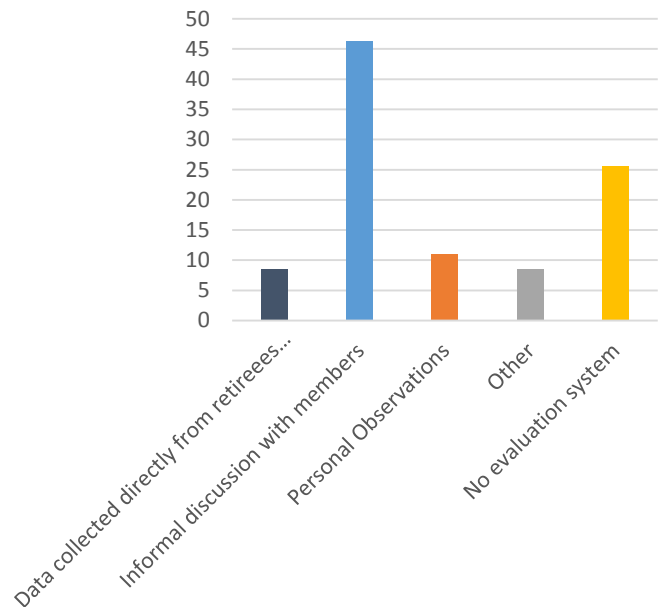
- The majority of RO representatives (72%) reported “the benefits of their RO outweigh its costs.”
- Only 17% purported their RO is very effective at fulfilling its mission; 73% reported their RO is somewhat effective
- Most ROs are evaluated only informally: Primary evaluation methods included Informal 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

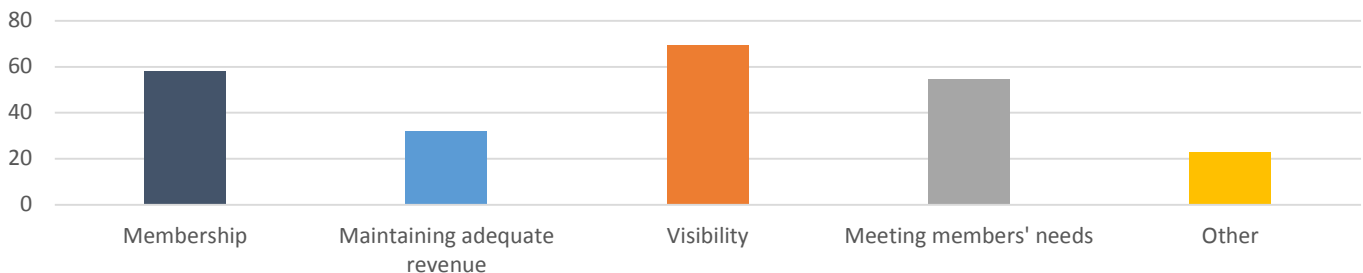
Question 18: Outcomes & Benefits of the Organization



Primary Evaluation Methods



Greatest Challenges



Views of RO Representatives Compared to Institutional Liaisons

Areas of Agreement

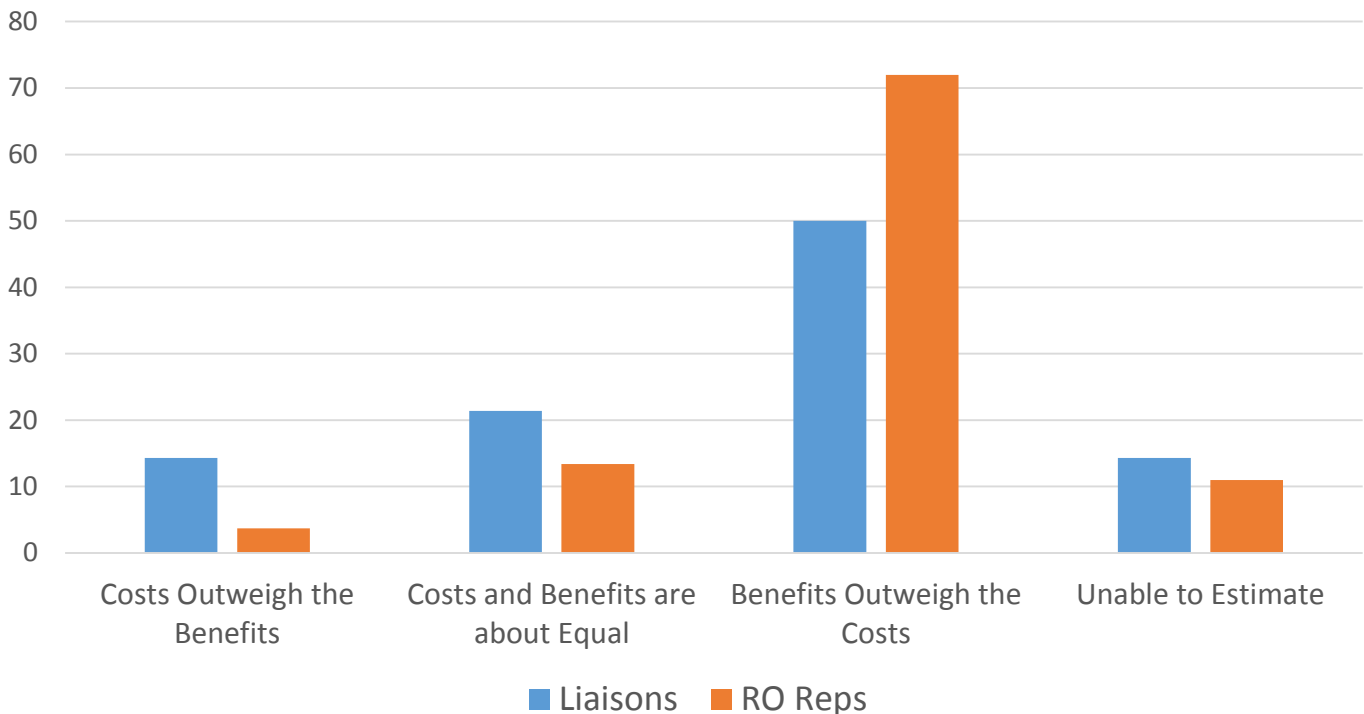
Category	RO Member	Liaison
Outcomes and Benefits		
Maintaining Institutional Connections	92%	85%
Maintaining friendships/relationships	92%	85%
Service to Institution	69%	58%
Service to Community	37%	45%
Aiding faculty/staff to transition to retirement	48%	51%
Challenges		
Visibility	69%	61%
Membership	58%	48%

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%)

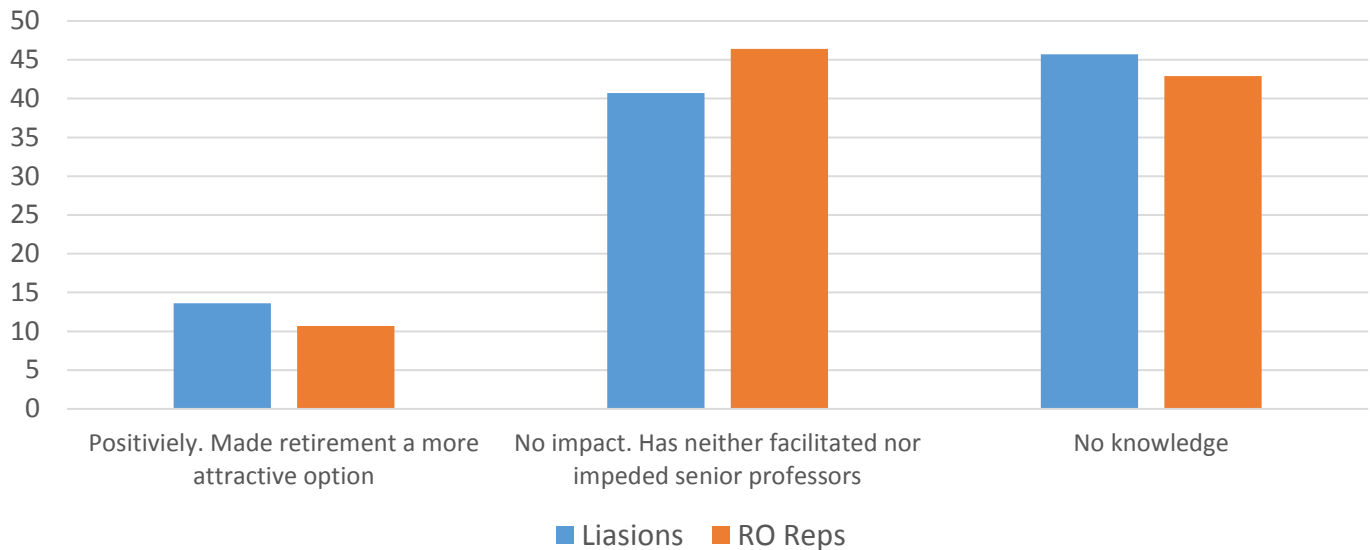
ROs may need to communicate their value more explicitly to their institutional community

Cost/Benefit Analysis: Retirement Organization Representatives vs. Liaisons



Organizational Influence on Senior Faculty Decisions to Retire

Impact on Senior Faculty Decisions to Retire



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?

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