
READERS RESPOND

BY STEPHANIE ROTH

In the six years since our last readers' survey, the number of paid subscribers to the *Grassroots Fundraising Journal* has grown from approximately 1,200 to nearly 4,500. We decided it was time to check in with all of you to find out how (and whether) our readership had changed, and to learn how we can make the *Journal* more useful to you.

We were pleased that 660 people responded to the survey (an 18 percent response rate), and thank all of you who took the time to give your thoughtful and thorough feedback.

Here is what we found out about you and what you think about the *Grassroots Fundraising Journal*.

READERS' ORGANIZATIONS

The work of organizations that subscribe to the *Journal* is quite diverse. When asked to check all categories that apply, readers said most often that the focus of their work is advocacy, children and youth issues, environment, and human services. Coming in close behind are community organizing or working on health and women's issues. There are also organizations working on arts and culture, disability issues, homelessness, racial justice, housing, gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender issues, as well as religious-based organizations, technical-assistance providers, and volunteer centers.

While among our subscribers are organizations with budgets of less than \$100,000 as well as those whose budgets top \$3 million, nearly half of *Journal* readers work in organizations with budgets of less than \$500,000. This is a decrease from our 1996 survey, when two-thirds of readers worked with organizations with budgets of less than \$500,000. Similarly, whereas in 1996, 24 percent of readers' organizations had budgets of more than \$1 million, today that rate has grown to 32 percent.

Although we'd like to take credit for this growth — possibly organizations have grown as a result of implementing the strategies and approaches the *Journal* recommends — at least another contributing factor is that it costs more to run a nonprofit organization in 2002 than it did in 1996. The kinds of equipment and technology required, the

efforts to increase salaries to at least meet the criteria of "living wage," and the skyrocketing cost of rent in major cities have all contributed to greater financial needs and budgets, even for grassroots organizations.

Another interesting statistic is that 25 percent of respondents are from organizations with *no* development staff.

People working in organizations that are struggling to increase their support from individual donors often ask if there are groups that actually do raise a substantial portion of their budget from individuals. Our survey shows that in fact, for a notable 25 percent of readers, more than half of their organizational budget comes from individuals. On the other hand, more than half of our readers' organizations depend on foundations for at least half of their funding, and the final 25 percent get more than half their funding from government sources.

WHAT YOU THINK ABOUT THE JOURNAL

The most common response to the question of how readers heard about us — from 18 percent of those answering — was through attending one of Kim Klein's workshops. Another 14 percent said they first learned of the *Journal* through our direct mail program, which we've increased significantly. The other two-thirds of the responses were pretty evenly split among hearing about the *Journal* at conferences and workshops, from a fellow subscriber, subscriptions already received in their office, ads in other publications, and the Internet.

What people most like about the *Grassroots Fundraising Journal* hasn't changed much since our last survey. Readers still appreciate that the *Journal* is "Basic, how-to and hands-on," "Well-written, clear and accessible." A smaller, but significant number of readers mentioned that they like that the *Journal* is geared to small organizations, that our writers are very knowledgeable about their topics, and that we write from a social justice perspective. Here are a few of our favorite responses:

"I haven't found another publication with so much practical information."

“It’s written so that inexperienced organizations can get up to speed quickly and in a tone that helps organizations get over their hurdles of doing major donor fundraising.”

“Targeted to *our* realities as small organizations working with generally scared, clueless volunteers.”

“Helps to empower timid fundraisers.”

The question, “What were some of your favorite articles?” revealed five favorite articles or series: the series on capital campaigns, the articles on data-base programs in our recent special issue (May/June 2002), “Fundraising in Difficult Times,” “Evaluating your Individual Donor Program,” and the series on planned giving.

SUGGESTED CHANGES

We were most interested in learning what readers don’t like about the *Journal* and how they think it could be improved. Though most readers saw nothing to be changed, the most frequently mentioned criticisms included the following comments: “Not enough articles,” “The cover,” “Major donor profiles,” “Articles redundant, too repetitive,” “Doesn’t come out often enough (should be monthly),” “I don’t have time to read it,” “Not relevant to large organizations.” There were many more comments as well, which we will take into account as we plan future issues of the *Journal*.

Improvements you suggested focused mainly on the kinds of topics you’d like to see covered more. Here are some samples:

- Strengthening the board, including how to get and maintain board involvement in fundraising
- How to approach major donors
- How to begin a Planned Giving program
- How to do successful special events.

You also asked us to write more about direct mail, using the Internet, fundraising for very small organizations, success stories from the trenches, evaluating fundraising, fundraising from corporations, and founders’ issues.

OTHER READING

We were interested to see what other publications you read related to fundraising and organizational development. They are most often the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, the *Nonprofit Quarterly*, and *Nonprofit Times*. A few of you also read *Advancing Philanthropy*, *Contributions Magazine*, the *Grantsmanship Center Newsletter*, and *Foundation News and Commentary*.

More than a third of our readers confessed that they had never visited our Web site (www.grassrootsfundraising.org), launched since our last readers’ survey. Those that have gone to the site said they most appreciated the Online Article Archive, where selected articles are posted free of charge. Also popular are the “Dear Kim” column (which you can also receive via our free monthly e-newsletter; sign up on the Web site), and the books on fundraising and social change that are available through the site.

About half of you said you would be interested in purchasing single articles online. That will soon be possible. With a new Web site service, you will be able to search by topic to identify single articles you’re interested in, then order and download them online.

AND THANKS AGAIN

Thanks to those of you who told us about people you think might be interested in the *Journal*. We’ve sent them sample copies to let them know about the publication and our Web-based services.

Again, thanks to all of you who took the time to fill out the Readers’ Survey. We take your feedback seriously and hope you will see your concerns and interests reflected in the *Journal* issues to come.

Whether or not you filled out the survey, please feel free to contact us any time with your comments about the *Journal*. We enjoy hearing from you. **GF**

STEPHANIE ROTH IS THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF THE *GRASSROOTS FUNDRAISING JOURNAL*. SHE ALSO CONSULTS ON ISSUES OF NON-PROFIT MANAGEMENT, BOARD DEVELOPMENT, AND FUNDRAISING.