

Fundraising by Friends of the Library Groups:
Profitability Trends and Effectiveness of Recent Initiatives

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ABSTRACT: Recent fundraising initiatives are examined to identify profitability trends. Surveys were distributed to Friends of the Library members (N=45) and library directors/library fundraisers (N=31) through nationwide online surveys. Library patrons (N=50) completed surveys at a public library on the eastern shoreline of Connecticut. Four trends emerged: 1) The importance of advanced technology tools in fundraising; 2) The importance of continually revising the used book sale; 3) The insignificance of eBooks on used book sales; and 4) The importance of divergent initiatives and joint collaboration.

Libraries and their funding sources are sensitive to economic climate. Recent inflationary trends impacting negatively on library budgets were found as early as 2005 in a study by OCLC. The Foundation Center (2010) reported fiscal year (FY) 2009 as the worst year for foundation giving in this country since the *Great Depression* of the 1930s. A 2011 survey conducted by ALA (2011) Office for Research & Statistics, found an increasing number of states reporting public library closures due to funding cuts.

Due to budgetary shortfalls, libraries have come to rely on auxiliary fundraising initiatives (Dempsey, 2010). Friends of the Library (FOL) groups provide their associated libraries with the planning, production, and management of auxiliary fundraising initiatives (Wolfe, 2005). Developing effective fundraising initiatives, however, requires understanding fundraising trends (Silverman, 2008). FOL groups have demonstrated an ongoing need for fundraising information in order to fulfill their mission (Wolfe, 2005) but that information is not necessarily readily available. In searching databases including Google Scholar, EBSCO Host, Academic OneFile, Emerald, ABI/Inform, ProQuest, and LexisNexis and reading in the literature found little in the way of recent studies regarding FOL fundraising initiatives. Indeed, D'Andraia, Fitzpatrick, and Oliver (2011) wrote that the majority of printed materials regarding FOL fundraising is comprised of either practical advice on establishing FOL groups, and/or creating and producing fundraising initiatives.

One possible reason for the lack of formal fundraising research studies might be due, in part, to preconceived opinions about FOL groups. In a related OCLC (2008) study of library support, elected government authorities viewed the fundraising efforts of FOL groups as insignificant. This opinion could be accounted for in that FOL fundraising initiatives are sometimes seen as disconnected, unrelated activities (Lehmann, n.d.).

Notwithstanding the lack of research on FOL fundraising, the literature does provide advice if not guidelines for successful fundraising. Browar and Streit (2003) stress the necessity of developing a long-range fundraising mission rather than, for

example, a FOL group relying solely on the proceeds of a used book sale as their fundraising initiative. As Browar and Streit point out, a single-vehicle strategy could potentially jeopardize the continuing success of the FOL's fundraising outcomes if that initiative is not well timed with current local interests and conditions.

Along with a long-range fundraising plan, Silverman (2008) tells us that effective fundraising incentives need to build donor relationships. Building donor relationships means determining effective services, programs and resources in order to promote successful fundraising initiatives (Silverman, 2009). Among the more common vehicles for fundraising initiatives are major appeals, annual contributions, and foundation funding; though, alternative fundraising activities have also been effective (Corson-Finnerty, & Blanchard, 1998). Swan (1990) observed that people often prefer to donate when there are exchanges of goods involved. This might be one reason why used book sales, which enable community members to buy and discard unwanted books (Swan, 1990), are in

to book sales, 11% preferring to volunteer, and 6% preferring to buy event tickets) of library patrons surveyed still prefer to physically attend fundraising events. In terms of

Many FOL members reported revising their used book selling techniques. These included adding online book selling, revising/increasing book prices, as well as creating library bookstores. The creation of and importance of maintaining a used bookstore was mentioned by several FOL. One wrote “We identified a space in the library that was not being used and opened a book sales room for daily sales...The income we have generated to help the library has risen from about \$10,000/yr to over \$40,000 to \$50,000 and up per year.” These up-to-date trends indicate that FOL groups are aware of a continuing need of revising the used book sale model.

There can be no doubt, with 100% of FOL survey participants conducting them, that the importance of continuing book sale profits is vital. And though this trend indicated the continuing effectiveness of the used book sale, it does cause concern should the model suffer in any way due to say eBooks or loss of interest in more traditional fundraising initiatives on the part of the public. But for now, particularly on intangible grounds, the majority of LD/LFs surveyed reported the book sale as a fundraising activity.

Current Fundraising Initiative Trends

Fundraising trends for library patrons overwhelmingly favors the used book sale

It would stand to reason that the more opportunities an FOL group has to offer its community in terms of both tangible and intangible fundraising activities, the greater its potential for effective fundraising. Leonhardt (2011) discusses the importance of intangible fundraising in terms of growing donor loyalty and relationships. The staff of the Worthington Library (2010) wrote that goodwill increases *social capital*. And *social capital can* be translated into fundraising dollars. Consider this comment by one FOL participant: “We use to focus primarily on book sales. We are now branching out to initiatives that will reach more people and also provide opportunities to advocate library services more regularly.”

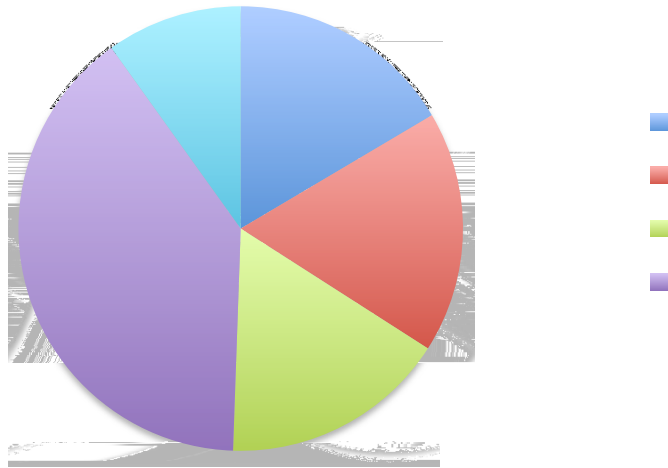
Joint Fundraising

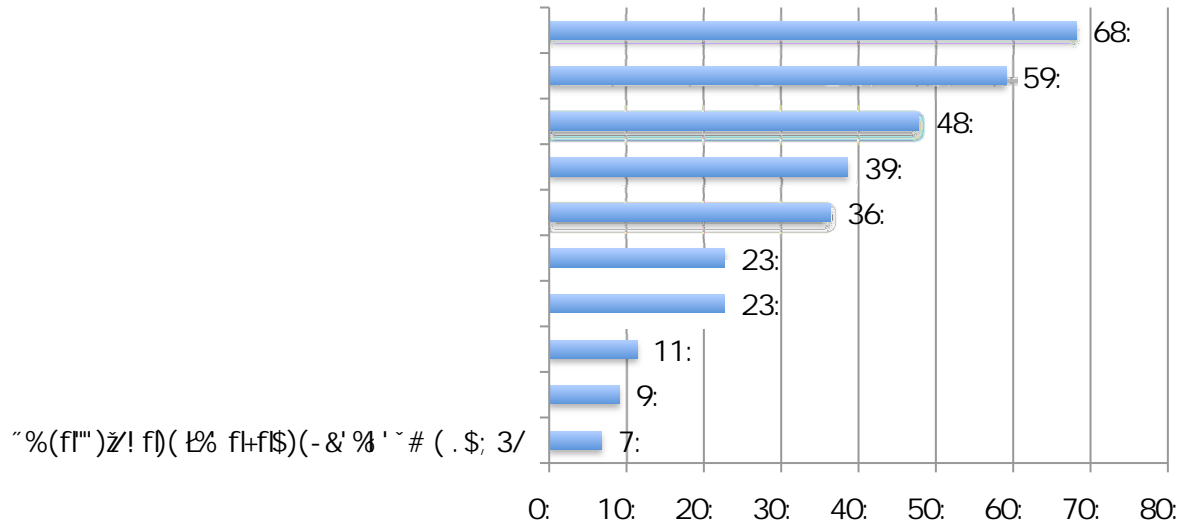
Adoption of initiative diversification can be affected by lack of time for fundraising. Joint collaborations might be one solution. By adding a collaborator’s time, energy and manpower, FOL could increase their overall fundraising opportunities. Consider this comment by one LD/LF

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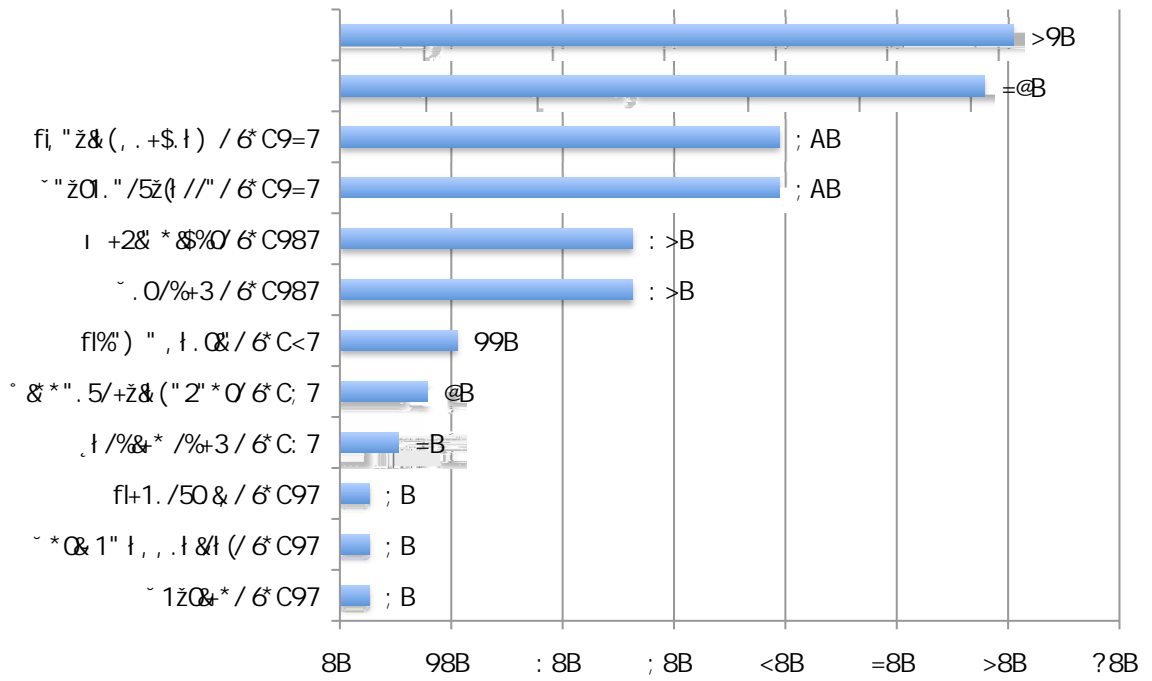
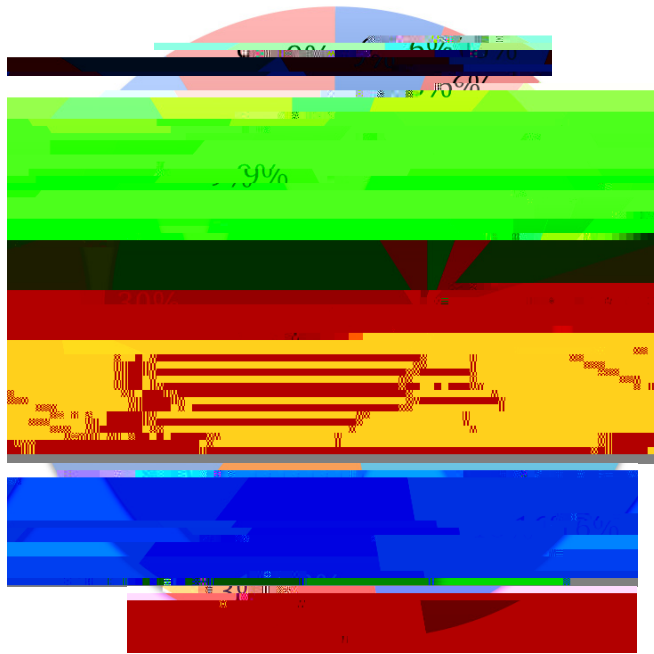
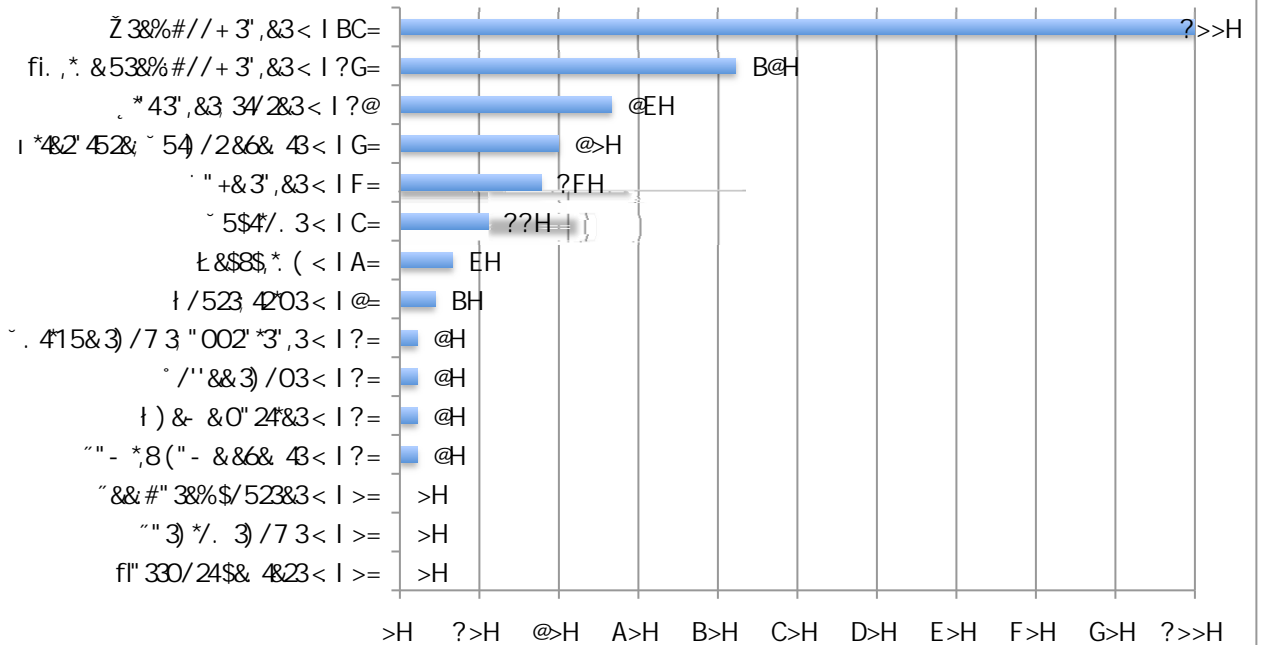


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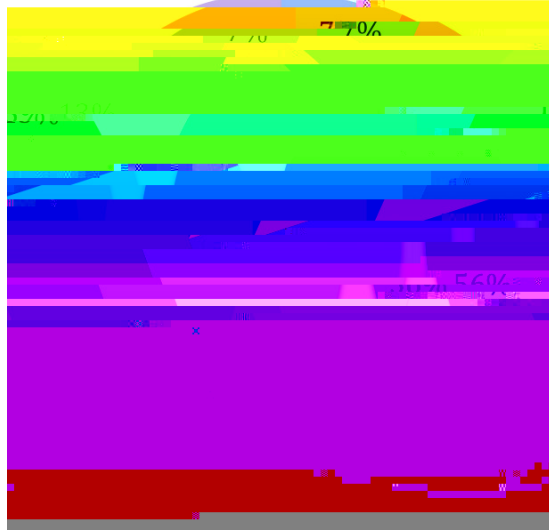
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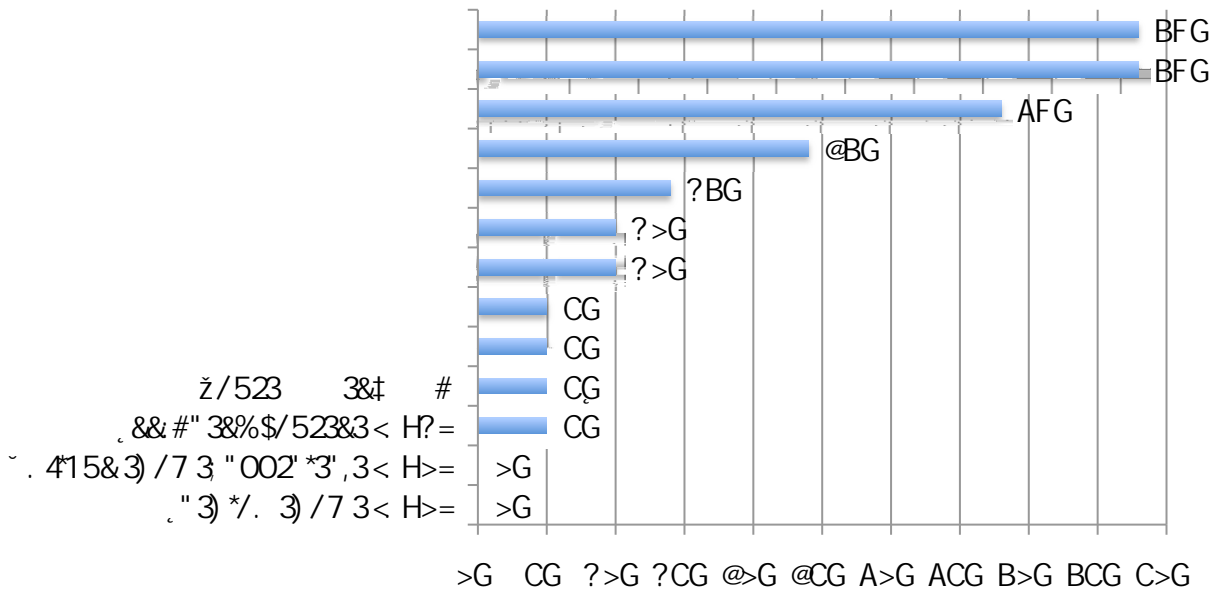


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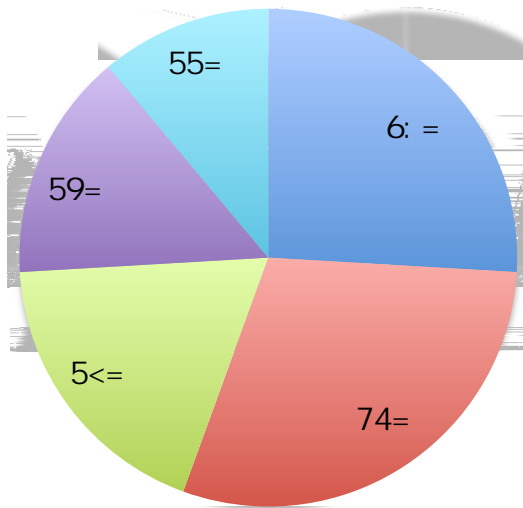


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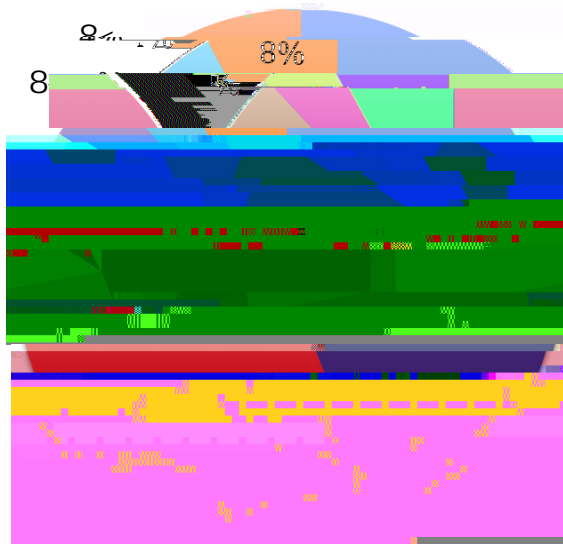
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Table 1. Listing of alternate sale items by survey participants

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| • Art sales | • Jigsaw puzzles | • Book nameplates |
| • Games | • Maps | • Strawberry Social |
| • Perpetual Calendar | • Drawings | • Used Jewelry |
| • Library advocacy items | • Spin art sale | • Used magazines |

Table 2. Listing of auxiliary fundraising initiatives by survey participants

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| • Sell sidewalk bricks engraved with donor's name | • Make a list of priorities of library's collection needs and inviting people to donate | • Raffle of floral bouquets based on books |
| • Rent or sell books to movie production companies | • Murder Mystery Event | • Strawberry Social |
| • Team Scrabble Challenge | • Parade of Pooches dog show | • Memorial wall |
| • Child-focused events/Paint-a-duck contest | • Community-wide Spelling Bee | • Music Nights |
| • Gingerbread house competition in December | • Macy's Shop for a Cause | • Gift wrapping at Border's |
| • February Tea Party | • Holiday Dinner Meeting | • Children's halloween party |
| • Direct Mail Art Sales | • Golf Tournament | • Vending center |
| • Parade of Parties events hosted by individuals or org[anization]s to benefit the Library | • Restaurant food tastings | • Copy and printing receipts |