



## 2020 Fundraising Analytics Survey Results

# Data Science Thrives, Mature Analytics Programs Pull Ahead

by Alex Oftelie, Sr. Vice President of Decision Science

*Analytics and Data Science has firmly entered a new chapter in fundraising: widespread adoption, thriving production, and a constant drive to innovate.*

BWF launched its 11th annual survey of the fundraising analytics community in July 2020. From the very first survey, we have sought to discover the trends in analytics methodology, applications, and tools popular with today's analysts, paying special attention to the impact across the industry. We received responses from across the United States, Canada, and Europe from data practitioners working at organizations representing every sector in the industry and raising a wide spectrum of funds annually. Here are the most compelling themes you shared and our key findings:

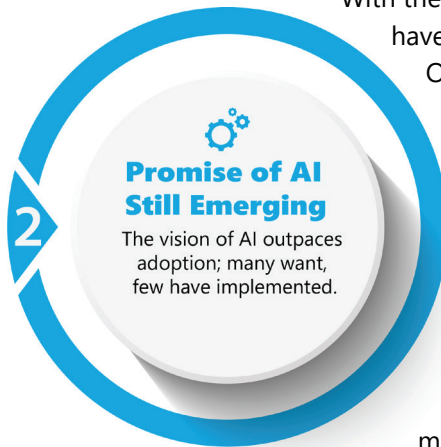
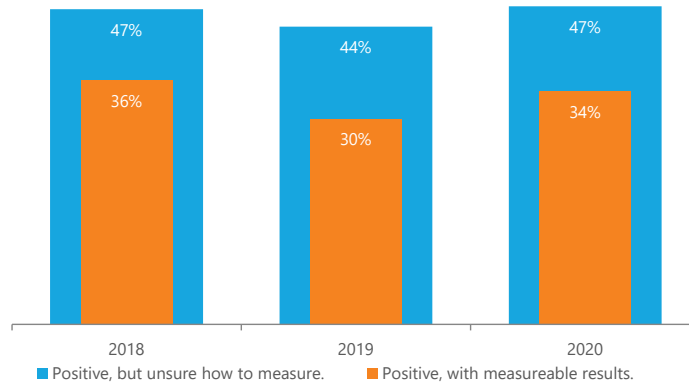




One of the most prominent themes in fundraising analytics has been the growth in internal capacity to meet analytics needs. There have been two prominent pathways to increasing analytics capacity: train existing fundraising staff in analytics (often staff within prospect development or advancement services and reporting), or hiring data science professionals from outside the industry. The latter has helped drive fundraising analytics innovation by bringing the latest concepts and vision from other industries and opening new doors and opportunities for growth (think AI).

Our 2020 survey reminded us how foundational domain knowledge is to being a “translator”: someone who can develop technical solutions, implement them across all staff, and successfully measure their outcomes. Analytics professionals and consumers were nearly identical in sharing positive views regarding analytics, but nearly half were unsure how to measure the impact. This demonstrates the value of “homegrown” analysts who can bring unique and valuable benefits to your program.

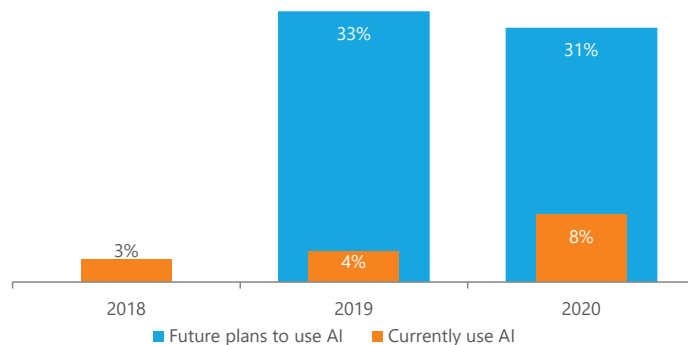
Impact of Analytics at Your Institution



With the exciting influx of external talent and skills, as well as growth from analysts who have been domain first, fundraising analytics has really adopted an explorer mentality. Once a technique or approach is understood, fundraising professionals have moved swiftly onto the “next thing.” The most significant example of this is AI, or artificial intelligence. It’s exciting to see that fundraising is keeping pace with industry regarding analytics adoption (historically there has been a lag), and recent survey data clearly indicated what the next frontier will be: artificial intelligence.

The 2019 and 2020 surveys demonstrated not only how much AI fundraising analytics adoption has caught up to industry, but the challenges in sustaining it. AI remains the top analytics priority, and much like our analytics partners in the for-profit world, it has remained elusive to implement.

AI Implementation vs. Vision





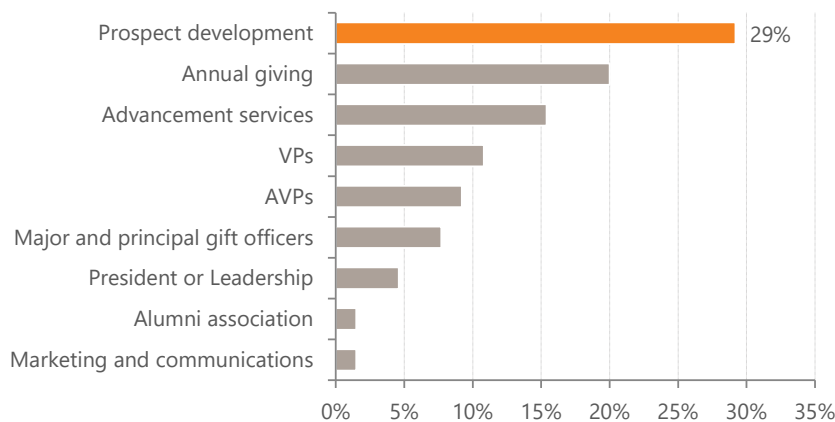
Analytics techniques and outcomes have grown exponentially over the last decade and are now commonplace in fundraising. It is normal to see major gift officers inquire and review predictive modeling techniques and factors. Leadership is excited by technology and the promise to help organically grow their programs. Analytics, it is safe to say, is embedded at every level the organization. The core user base, however, remains focused.

Over 65% of primary consumers are in what are traditionally defined as “back-of-house” functions. This focused group of core users may help explain some of the disconnect between analytics and measurable impact. A small and dedicated core group uses analytics regularly, while their colleagues have less interaction and less understanding of the value of analytics. This “back-of-house” reality also aligns with established methods and functions, reflecting the overall maturity of analytics production. It is important to consider, however, who our “core audience” is today and who else warrants engagement, as organizations move along the analytics maturity curve and strive for great integration and adoption.

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**Consumers, In Focus**  
Analytics adoption is very back-of-house.

### Primary Consumers of Analytics

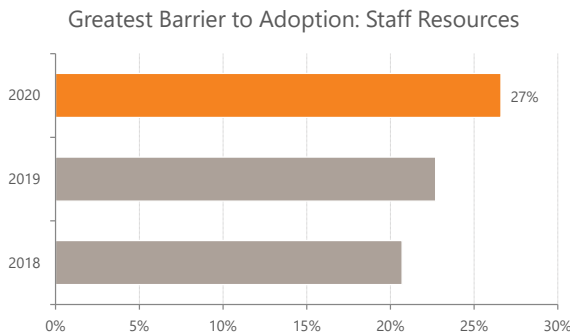


Respondents continue to share their demand for shared and common knowledge, skills, and competency in fundraising analytics. This demand is best expressed through continued preference for analytics certification, which could help train, unite, and advance practitioners and consumers in our field. This has been discussed widely among Apra and other professional communities, and while it can present some unique challenges, the adoption and benefits are in high demand among all types of users and consumers.

**4**

**Shared and Common Knowledge**  
Industry has a shared vision for analytics standards and training certification.

For the third consecutive year, there has been a common theme to adoption: demand for analytics outpaces the necessary staff resources available. Skills, data, and technology are all common barriers shared among respondents, but with growth of adoption, the industry has reached a tipping point of “luxury/project” becoming “essential/process” with how it views analytics projects. With demand only increasing, and the growing specialization and customization of the analytics consumer base, programs at every spectrum of the analytics maturity curve have developed a hybrid approach of internal and outsourced



analytics services to meet organization needs. Given the current climate of budget awareness, we see this hybrid approach continuing to grow over the coming year.

This reality will give rise to all sorts of opportunities, from automation and efficiency, broader training to develop more producers, and increased staffing. These are all positive solutions to resource challenges and leading indicators for the continued impact of analytics in organic fundraising growth.

Across the 2020 fundraising analytics survey, the most consistent theme was the consistency of perspectives. From vision to barriers and finally, to the impact of analytics within an organization, the industry is consistent in its outlook. While we saw analytics professionals with fundraising backgrounds having greater success in sharing the impact of analytics, overall sharing of measurable outcomes remains elusive for many organizations.



We conclude by repeating a consistent takeaway as a reminder of the overall vision for fundraising analytics: to demonstrate a measurable positive impact on fundraising. By keeping this goal firmly in your sight, the fundraising analytics community can only continue to grow, serve, and change philanthropy. ■

### Author

Alexander Oftelie is senior vice president of decision science at BWF where he oversees all BWF Insight analytics engagements, workshops and trainings, and product implementation. His specific areas of expertise include predictive modeling, business impact analysis, survey design and sampling methodology, analytics training, and analytics implementation. Prior to working at BWF, Alex worked as a nonprofit subject matter expert for IBM and as an advanced analytics consultant for Gallup. At IBM, Alex specialized in helping clients understand and demonstrate the impact of business analytics on fundraising and engagement efforts of nonprofits throughout North America.

### About BWF

BWF is an international fundraising consulting and services company headquartered in North America. As both experts in complex philanthropy and the leading innovator in the field, we bring both a global perspective and local know-how, providing deep cross-sector strategic and tactical solutions to advance our clients fundraising abilities. It's why clients turn to us as their trusted partner, expanding their knowledge and abilities through our panoramic view of philanthropy. Not only do we stimulate the industry through thought leadership, but we are an incubator of multidisciplinary “next practices,” always testing new ideas and exploring innovative ways of doing things. To learn more visit [bwf.com](http://bwf.com) or email [info@bwf.com](mailto:info@bwf.com).